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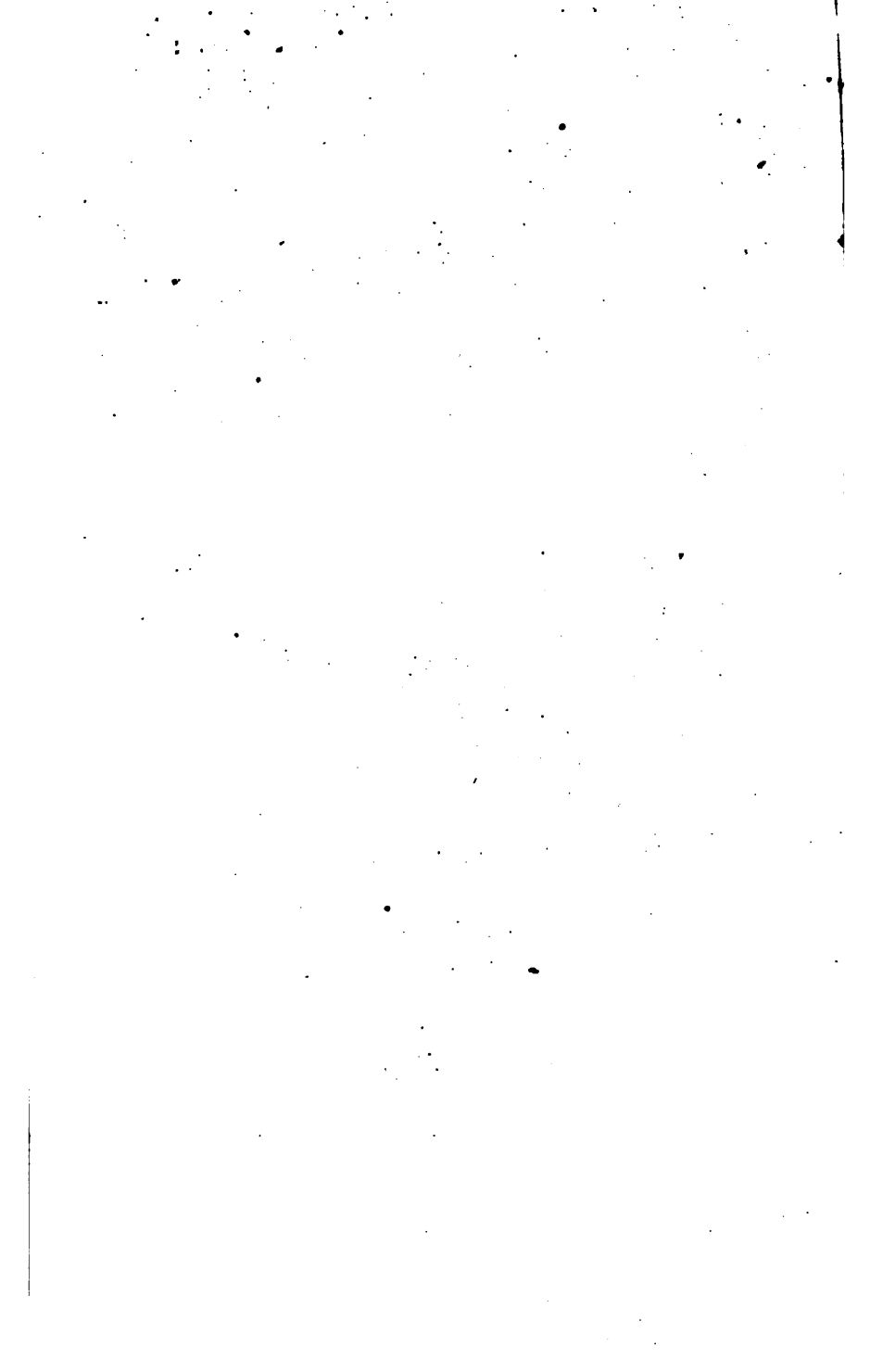
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**FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS
REWARD.**

A Nobel.



BY A BARRISTER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1867.

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FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

CHAPTER I.

A NOTORIOUS criminal was, one morning, proceeding, on foot, to the place of execution, accompanied by a father confessor, whose efforts to improve the occasion were not altogether well received.

2 The culprit, unfortunately, chanced to be in what nurses term a 'fractional' mood; and evinced his repugnance to the entire proceeding by first of all 'stepping short' in the most unconscionable manner, and

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subsequently subsiding into plain goose-step when fairly within sight of the gallows.

“My good brother,” urged his ghostly companion with a persuasive nudge, “if you had the slightest idea how late we are, you would, I am certain, walk a little faster. Do you suppose that, because you have naturally no engagements for the afternoon, we are all equally free? I assure you, for my own part, that I have a great deal upon hand; and so, probably, have many of the gentlemen yonder. Pray come along! We ought to have been upon the drop by this time. Just look at the crowd!”

“No hurry, Governor,” replied the penitent, gruffly. “They can’t begin without us.”

I should scarcely imagine that, under the circumstances, much consolation could have been extracted from this palpable truism.

But the words themselves frequently recur to my mind with very salutary effect—‘No hurry, Governor. They can’t begin without us.’

Say that to yourself, my friend, as I do, when you fancy you are going to be late for a dinner, a train, a consultation—or possibly for morning church. You will be right nine times out of ten. Either they won’t begin without you, or you will pick up your place in a canter, which is practically much the same thing. And the wear and tear of a certain nervous tissue—worn and torn beyond computation by disquieting anxieties upon such matters—will be saved altogether, which is as much as adding two clear years to your life, a consideration not to be lost sight of, as times go. They won’t begin without you. Make a note of that.

There is only one contingency in which

1—?

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I cannot advise you to rely upon this comfortable assurance. Never write a story under the delusion that your readers can't begin without you. Bless your innocence, why not? They can read you backwards, or forwards, or skipping-ways, just as they please; and cut altogether those careful passages which you so often smiled over in secret, as the very key-stones and buttresses of your narrative. As to not beginning without you, it is only too certain that they will begin and end exactly where they choose.

The above digression came into my mind as I was finishing my last chapter. I felt a misgiving that the little dissertation in which I had indulged, with a view of preparing the ground for what is immediately to follow, might be accepted by some wary people as a sort of salutary warning, and

acted upon accordingly. I fancied I saw them cunningly turning over my leaves until they found themselves quite clear of the shop, and then 'beginning without me' some twenty pages down stream, leaving me to trudge after them at my leisure.

It is unpleasant, however, even to moralize upon such possible treachery, and a relief to return to my narrative.

When Colonel Fleetlands deliberately sat down to concoct his own will, he had three objects prominently before his mind.

In the first place, he wished to secure for his little Helen, so far as human foresight could extend, a thoroughly happy and comfortable home, where she should not only be a welcome but a coveted guest. This was easy.

In the second place, he was anxious to protect her effectually, during her girlish

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inexperience, against those prowling adventurers who were certain to 'go in' for so splendid a prize as a maiden with several thousands a year. This appeared a problem equally simple.

Lastly, he desired to restore a large portion of Mr. Nettleton's fortune to the family or relatives of that gentleman. The property had fallen to him through the merest accident, and was far larger than he had even the slightest inclination to retain for his daughter. He had no sentimental scruples about using that which was absolutely his own, but he exercised his right, subject to the self-imposed understanding, that after helping himself and his own liberally, he was not entitled to trifle with the remainder. Here again all seemed plain sailing.

With these objects in view, Colonel Fleet-

lands' testamentary dispositions ran as follows. I give the will as he wrote it, simply because it is not a technical, but a straightforward, soldier-like document, which in itself explains the manner in which he conceived that his wishes could best be carried into effect:—

“THIS IS THE LAST WILL of me, Edward Fleetlands, Lieut.-Col. H.E.I.C.S. I appoint my friend, Hercules Mortlake, of Riverwood Lawn, St. Mark's-on-the-Sea, in England, a captain R.N., guardian of my only daughter, Helen, until she attain the age of twenty-three years. Should he decline so to act, or die, then I appoint the Rev. Felix Salterton, rector of Riverwood, aforesaid, guardian of my said daughter. Should they both decline to act, or die, I request the Bishop of London for the time being to name a guardian. I give my said

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daughter the sum of fifty thousand pounds, which I direct shall be at once invested in consols by my executors. I desire that out of the interest of this sum, five hundred pounds per annum shall be received by my daughter's guardian for the time being, for her maintenance, education, clothing, and pocket-money. The rest of the interest is to be accumulated and added to the principal until she attains the age of twenty-three or marries, when the whole is to be transferred into her name. Should she die under twenty-three, or marry under that age without the consent of her guardian for the time being, her interest is to pass to the persons hereafter named, except that, in the event of her marriage without such consent, I desire that she may receive two hundred pounds a year for life, and no more, to be strictly settled to her separate use. I give the

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legacies mentioned in the list below; and, subject as above stated, I give all the residue of my property among the persons who would have been entitled thereto had I not been named in the will of the late Mr. Nettleton. And so I leave my soul to God, appointing Captain Mortlake and Mr. Salterton my executors. Done and dated at Cossambazar, this 13th day of September, &c., &c."

[Schedule of Legacies.]

Now, with one unlucky exception, the above, as every lawyer must admit, was a most creditable specimen of amateur testatorship.

No guardian could help feeling warmly towards a child who brought him substantially an additional income of five hundred pounds a year.

No gay deceiver was likely to entangle

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the inexperience of a blooming heiress, whose wealth would disappear upon seizure, like the colours of a butterfly under a school-boy's cap.

Up to twenty-three, at all events, her marriage would have to be contracted with the deliberate approval of her guardian for the time being. No great hardship after all. There is no magic in the precise age of one-and-twenty, and many young ladies, who will never be one-and-twenty again, deceive themselves wofully in the estimate of their own worldly wisdom. Indeed I don't understand why we, insular and independent Britons as we are, should vote ourselves mature at an earlier period than people are content to ripen at, anywhere else in the world. In France, Spain, and Germany in general, full majority is not conceded until twenty-five. Under this age

no young man can dispose of himself without the consent of his parents or guardians, as the case may be—although young ladies are, here and there, let off more easily. In Spain, for instance, they have only to wait for twenty-three ; whilst, oddly enough, your Burgomaster's daughter is permitted to dive into matrimony upon her own hook the very moment she is out of her teens.

To return, however, to the will, and the unfortunate paragraph just referred to.

Why, in the name of all that is wonderful, was Colonel Fleetlands rash enough to write those lines—"I give all the residue of my property among the persons who would have been entitled thereto, had I not been named in the will of the late Mr. Nettleton?"

Far better to have flung a lighted hand grenade among the powder barrels of Dum-

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Dum. The bang would have been big and bad, but soon over. But these few words consigned his estate at once to the mercies of the Court of Chancery in England. These few words let loose at once the spirit of rapine and discord in at least fifty hearts. These few words stirred up envies, hatreds and malices, which may scatter fire and poison among generations yet unborn.

In a will, all is irrevocable. The writer passes away into the land that is very far off, beyond all reach of human question. None can ask him what he meant, if he has failed to express that meaning. If no possible construction can be put upon his words, the law, of necessity, disregards them, and distributes the property as if no will had ever been made. But if *any* meaning can be attached to them, however unjust, mischievous, or absurd in the result, the law

accepts that meaning, and abides by it through thick and thin. No evidence of intention is, generally speaking, admissible. What the testator has written he has written, and must be accepted as sufficient, and expounded as oracular.

I dare say that, unless you are yourself imbued with the wisdom of the legal serpent, you might read the mischievous few lines above referred to at least twice over without suspecting any particular harm. Perhaps, under similar circumstances, you might even have expressed your own meaning much in the same way. Well, I will not pause now, to explain exactly what was wrong, or what was the exact question to which these words gave birth; but in case you should feel any curiosity upon the subject, or any wish to be wiser, I have transcribed in the note below, and I hope you will read, an opinion

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written by a brother barrister under the impression (accidental upon my part) that the case I put to him was occurring in my own practice.*

* "DEAR W.—I have read your note carefully. Of course you will file your bill at once; as no executor would dream of acting upon his own responsibility in such a case. Colonel F. seems to have had £4000 of his own, *plus* say £100,000, bequeathed to him by Mr. N. Out of this fund he leaves £50,000 to his daughter, and the residue 'among the persons who would have been entitled thereto, had he not been named in N.'s will.' What in the world does he mean? The fact that by Nettleton's will the £100,000 became Col. Fleetlands' property, cannot be affected by anything contained in the Colonel's will. Consequently it became part of, and passed under the description of his, (Colonel Fleetlands') residue.

"This residue Colonel Fleetlands attempts to dispose of, by referring to Mr. Nettleton's will.

"But, instead of giving it to the person who would have been entitled to the residue of Mr. Nettleton's estate if he (Colonel Fleetlands) had not been named, he gives it to the persons who would have been entitled to *his own residue*, if he had not been named!

"The supposed omission of Colonel Fleetlands'

A very few mornings afterwards, the long anticipated event occurred. Colonel Fleet-

name from Mr. Nettleton's will, fails to afford any clue to the persons who would be entitled to Colonel Fleetlands' residue, with reference to that contingency. The description is unintelligible, and the gift must fail.

"I assume that there are no recitals in the early part of the will, such as—'Whereas I desire that, subject to the legacy hereby given to my daughter, so much of my property as I derived under the will of Mr. Nettleton, should revert to his family,' because it is possible that some such recital might connect the bequest so intimately with Mr. Nettleton's will, as to allow the Court to substitute the words 'to the residue of Mr. Nettleton's property,' for the word 'thereto.'

"In short my view is, that the testator has altogether failed to describe the parties whom he intended to take his residue; the description he has given being incapable of being made sense of without introducing a large amount of extrinsic evidence to show his meaning—or probable meaning.

"The bequest therefore fails altogether as a gift, and the residue goes, as a matter of course, to the daughter, as next of kin, unless something in the will prevents it.

"The fact of the testator having given a fixed legacy

lands was found at day-dawn speechless in his bed. And as the boom of sunset-gun from the neighbouring cantonments rolled heavily over Cossambazar, the heart of a good man and gallant soldier was quietly hushed for ever.

Loving and careful hands tended the little orphan in her unperceived bereave-

to his daughter, and the residue to others, renders it morally certain that it was not *his intention* that his daughter should take the residue as well as the legacy. But if, as I hold, he has altogether failed sufficiently to describe the object of the gift of residue, and the gift on that account fails, I do not think that his inferred intention would be considered as any bar to her taking it.

“I cannot see how the Colonel’s next of kin (other than his daughter and only child) could possibly be let in, even if the words of the gift to the daughter went so far as to express a positive prohibition to her taking more than the legacy under any circumstances. If you cannot fix upon the *proper* people to take, it must go to the real next of kin, I should think.”

ment, and provided for her transplantment to English soil. And, in charge of a magnificent brown Ayah, all turban, teeth, and earrings, the child was in due course cleared at the Southampton Docks by Mr. Bloss himself; who, as holding the will under which her splendid fortune had devolved, considered himself bound to do the honours of Old England upon her first arrival. And, under his escort, she was safely deposited a few days later with her gallant guardian at Riverwood Lawn, hard by St. Mark's-on-the-Sea.

And this would seem to be the time to give some account of Admiral Mortlake personally. His acquaintance in a casual sort of way we have already had the opportunity of making.

Colonel Fleetlands and he had been school-boys together, and had contracted

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one of those early friendships which outlast all others. Mortlake was a brave, wilful boy, cock of the school, and deservedly respected all round upon the very sufficient ground that he was going to be midshipman in a frigate before next half. And midshipman, dirk and all, he accordingly became, with as fair a career before him as ever was cut out for a young sailor.

His family were immensely rich, with high Admiralty interest; his father chief of one of the greatest county banks in the kingdom, with a noble landed estate, upon which young Mortlake, as an eldest son, might have looked forward to a life of luxurious independence.

But his tastes were not for flocks and kine; whilst as to sitting behind a desk in pen-and-inky slavery during the best hours of every day, he would far sooner have been

mast-headed regularly for the same period—an elevation, by the way, which he subsequently had pretty frequent opportunities of enjoying. In short he seemed, as it were, born for the sea, with every quality, except one, which was requisite to ensure success. A reckless, insubordinate spirit marred all. He could not obey cheerfully. There are men who cannot. It is a base failing. ‘Imperantur ut imperant’ was not said of such. Not, at least, of one in ten thousand.

And so, after rising to the command of a frigate, Captain Mortlake came suddenly to grief. The version which we landsmen received of the affair may possibly have been even less accurate than the information usually supplied to the marines. But we all believe that one fine afternoon, when a squadron was running down Channel, under

all sail, Captain Mortlake received such a series of aggravating and 'nagging' signals from his Admiral, between whom and himself a private feud existed; that he lost all control over his temper—suddenly beat to quarters, and sent a thundering broadside of blank cartridge right into the spectacles of that fussy old gentleman, who was only half a cable's length to leeward.

Of course, as soon as the latter could be unsuffocated sufficiently to sputter, he signalled Captain Mortlake on board in fury; and though we don't pretend to know precisely what passed in the Admiral's cabin, we are quite clear that Captain Mortlake's alternative lay between instantly retiring upon half-pay, or standing a court-martial. And we are morally certain that, but for the tremendous amount of interest which he was fortunately enabled to bring to bear, the

result of this unlucky explosion of temper and gunpowder would have had no alternative about it.

Be this as it may, it is beyond all doubt that Captain Mortlake quitted the service entirely against his own inclination, and retired to the life of a country gentleman upon his estate at Riverwood, a morose, dissatisfied man.

Perhaps to an active and domineering spirit, no severer trial can easily be conceived than that of being summarily expelled from a profession. A dark cloud is at once flung down upon the whole stretch of the future, in which it is impossible to discern the 'silver lining.' In Captain Mortlake's case, the sentence was simply one of civil death. What were a thousand acres of grass and furrow, compared with those few feet of glossy quarter-deck? He resented his fate

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both upon himself and those about him, and, avoiding society altogether, lived for some time a life of savage seclusion.

No doubt sulking has its pleasures: but unless we have reasonable grounds for supposing that we are making others at least half as uncomfortable as ourselves, they scarcely outweigh its disadvantages. To some extent Captain Mortlake had the satisfaction of believing that, if he chose to lead the life of a hermit, the neighbourhood must have wished it otherwise. With a noble domain, a splendid country house, and every means at his command for the exercise of princely hospitality, it was so much the worse for them when he sternly closed his gates. There is something almost fascinating in such a burial of unbounded wealth. Whereas, let a poor man amuse himself after the same fashion, and we simply say, "Poor

devil! The sooner the coroner's wanted the better."

But this gourd of his solitude was destined to dry up, as it were, in a night. The bank stopped payment. Not a very uncommon occurrence, but, like a railway accident, frightfully astonishing to all concerned, from the directors sitting in dismayed committee, down to the guilty switch-man who brought it all about, and the poor third-class passenger whose head is picked out of the ballast. It was a terrible break down—not quite irremediable as regarded the concern, but involving thousands in the most serious perplexity and distress. To Captain Mortlake it was little less than ruin. Half the Riverwood estate was sold, and the remainder heavily mortgaged, and every sixpence of his stocks and shares confiscated, before he was out of the scrape.

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How it all came about, matters little now. No need to talk about that pre-eminently meek and subservient clerk, always clad in Sunday black, who wore gloves, and discountenanced sporting language in the vicinity of his virtuous desk. He is at Portland this morning, suffering from a rather large padlock on the pastern, and in the way, I hope, of being liberally whipped, not once for good, but ever and anon, before he is again entrusted with pen and ink. Pen and ink! that, Captain Mortlake never could abide, and resented his dislike by plucking him bare.

Just at this conjuncture, news arrived in England of Colonel Fleetlands' death, and of Captain Mortlake's appointment as his executor and guardian of little Helen. A few months before, he might have surlily refused to act. But times had changed.

In two points of view, the chance was not one to be neglected. In the first place, five hundred a-year was just at the moment an immense object. Of course the poor little Indian baby who brought it would be a nuisance; but she might, for the present, at all events, be kept in the nursery and perfectly out of the way; so that there was no substantial drawback upon that head.

Secondly, this very baby might, in a few years become, in another respect, a rather desirable acquisition. Long before the bank smash, Mortlake had begun to discover that he was making a miserable fool of himself by growling through his gates at the world, which he fancied had done him wrong. And the worst of growling is, that when the good wish comes over us to wag our tails and be friendly, the difficulty of getting that said tail into motion, or delivering it at all

from our hind legs, without conscious loss of dignity, is a sad obstacle in the way of amendment. But, with a brilliant young heiress to bring forward, all would be easy. She would be an excuse, at once, for entering society again ; and the world, as he sullenly admitted, he was no longer in a condition to defy. So he at once accepted his new duties, and, in conjunction with Mr. Salterton, proved his late friend's will in the Principal Registry of Her Majesty's Court of Probate.

That I have been neglecting Mrs. Mortlake all this time, is quite true. In that respect, I am afraid I resemble her husband, who hated counsel of every description, and, above all, that of his wife. He was neither in the habit of listening to her reasons, nor of troubling her with his own. And if, for purely financial purposes, he chose to present

her with a full-fledged baby instead of the callow little 'pledge' which sentimental people so pleasingly describe, and which, in his own case, had never arrived, she had no option, you may depend, but to accept the gift, and make the best of it.

I had no intention, when I began my story, of attempting to entice anybody who might do me the honour of perusing it, into the diabolical labyrinth of a Chancery suit. I will not do so now. I will not even explain the construction ultimately put by the Court upon those unfortunate words, "I give all the residue of my property among the persons who would have been entitled thereto, had I not been named in the will of the late Mr. Nettleton."

But the result was, that in the face of the innumerable claimants whom these words called suddenly into legal existence, it was

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impossible for the executors to act at all, except under the protection of the court. So they filed their bill in Chancery, in which Captain Mortlake and Mr. Salterton were plaintiffs, and Helen, and some score of others, were defendants, and interlocutory and other decrees were made, and costs were ordered out of the estate, and everything went on as comfortably as need be, and after the fashion in which things constantly go on when testators have been so economical as to make their own wills.

One result of the suit, however, you will perhaps have the goodness to bear in mind. Helen's £50,000 was ordered to be realised and paid into the Bank of England, to the credit of the Accountant-general of the Court of Chancery, to be duly invested in consols; out of the interest of which £500 per annum was directed to be paid to Cap-

tain Mortlake, as her guardian, and the remainder accumulated for her benefit until further order.

It was among the consequences of this considerate proceeding that she thereupon became immediately a Ward of Court.

Over persons in this position, the Court of Chancery, as is well known, exercises a protectorship at once jealous, vigilant, and despotic. To marry a young lady so situated, without the court's consent, is stigmatised as 'Ravishment of Ward,' of which, in former times, the court (succeeding, as it did, the Star Chamber, in cognisance of such offences) used to mark its disapproval by imprisonment for life, or by enforcing perpetual abjuration of the realm. So that, as was naïvely remarked in an old case, 'the grievousness of the punishment showed the greatness of the offence.'

Even at the present moment, such a marriage, or indeed any preliminary flirtation with marriage in view, is considered as an aggravated criminal contempt in all parties concerned, which the court will always resent as nearly touching its honour and justice, and severely deal with. The bridegroom goes forthwith to the Queen's prison, and the incautious parson is lucky if he can find anybody to listen to his miserere.

Ignorance, or want of notice of the fact that the infant was a ward, is an excuse which cannot be attended to upon any account, for the plain and satisfactory reason that every suit, or other proceeding, in chancery, is a *lis pendens*, of which all good subjects are bound to take notice.

Neither, in the plenitude of its anxiety to extend protection where protection is needed, will the court withhold its assist-

ance, even where the cause of interference may have arisen in the case of an infant, male or female, not previously a ward.

Not many months ago, for example, a certain affable Miss Richardson contrived to 'ravish' a young prodigal aged nineteen, who quitted the paternal roof to enjoy her company unmolested, in the neighbourhood of Dorset Square. So far, so bad. But the lady, not content with love, demanded matrimony also, and the feeble youth wrote home to his mamma, bidding her not grieve any more, because he had turned over a new leaf, and was really going to be married.

His papa, however, who looked for consolation from other sources, couldn't stand this, and instantly executed a settlement of one hundred pounds upon the offending simpleton, in whose name, as next friend, he

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forthwith filed a bill to administer the trusts thereof.

This made the bridegroom intendant at once a ward in Chancery, and the very next morning, Miss Richardson's frail gaiety was disturbed by a notice that another interview with her young friend, would be purchased at the cost of her liberty.

There now! If anything in the way of , ravishment' should ever threaten poor Helen, I trust you feel competent to shake your head in good time, and to prophesy that 'assuming' this, and 'subject to' that, and 'apart from' something else (qualifications without which no legal opinion is worth a rush); such and such will be the end of the transgressor.

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CHAPTER II.

IN my last two chapters I have been obliged to ascend for some little distance up the stream of history, in order to explain the circumstances under which Helen passed into the guardianship of the master of Riverwood Lawn. I am now about to square my story, by bringing my account of her down to the exact period at which our friend Petersfeld set out upon his remarkable chase.

It is unfortunate that I should be obliged to leave him so long in the background, especially in such a promising scrape ; but

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he must take his turn like the rest of us, according to the rule of the world, and shall have no cause to complain of his historian before I have done with him.

Admiral Mortlake—for I may as well give him his flag at once, although he did not actually attain it for some dozen years after Colonel Fleetlands' death—was not naturally an avaricious man. Few sailors are—so at least we believe, ashore—though few people, I fancy, are less content with their wages, or cry out more lustily for what they are pleased to call prize-money, a luxury which we land-lubbers never even expect. But the bank disaster, to which I have just referred, had changed his nature for the worse. It is among the worst results of these mercantile catastrophes that they are apt to damage a man in mind, even more than in purse. The man who limps

away out of a railway accident may hope to get his leg put straight again, some day ; but ten to one, the man who has been seriously run over in a money smash, will hardly pull through without some crook in his mind which all the doctors in Europe would fail to disentangle.

It was obvious that in accepting Helen and her five hundred a-year, he was treading the very verge of what could strictly be considered honourable. He knew well that her father, in entrusting her to his care, was under the impression that he was possessed of a splendid country seat, with a fortune to correspond ; and it might well be that it was in a home of this description, that he wished and expected the little heiress to be brought up. He knew, equally, that the house could now scarcely be considered as his own, while his affairs were so miser-

ably embarrassed, that but for the trifling additional income thus thrown in his way, it was by no means certain that even by the exercise of the most penurious economy, he would be able to continue his establishment at Riverwood at all.

However, he was in no mood to indulge in sentimental scruples, and comforted himself with the resolution that he would take the best possible care of his ward—a precaution clearly desirable under the circumstances.

One point only gave him a little uneasiness. He had a vague suspicion that awkward questions might one day or other be asked by the Court of Chancery, with reference to his expenditure of Helen's money. Trustees, he knew, were considered peculiarly 'accountable' people by that intrusive tribunal, and proverbially afforded more sport

than almost any other class of individuals when brought in to be badgered. His neighbour and co-executor, Mr. Salterton, had once mooted something upon the subject which rather startled him ; but after all, looking at the will as it stood, the case seemed straightforward enough. All he had to do was to feed, clothe, and educate the little lady, and provide her with pocket-money when she was old enough to spend it, and the rest was his plain and proper fee for quasi paternal care and responsibility.

Now, although I have undertaken in some degree to furnish a memoir of Miss Fleetlands, from the day of her birth up to that upon which my story commences, I have no idea of wasting useful time and paper in an elaborate chronicle of her nursery days.

She seems, by all accounts, to have been

a peculiarly fascinating little creature—the pet of every one at Riverwood Lawn. Even Mortlake himself found a soft corner in that tough and ancient muscle which he probably talked about as his heart, and suffered the child to follow him all about the house, and to frequent his private sitting-room at her pleasure.

This latter apartment was Helen's especial delight. It was a large, handsome room, with a French window opening upon the lawn, filled with curiosities of all kinds, of which the Admiral, it would seem, had in former times been a most fortunate collector. Giant lay-figures were there—copper men of Patagon—fellows who, like the jolly young waterman, renowned in song, 'feathered their skulls with such skill and dexterity,' that they looked like bad human cockatoos, and were altogether real stumbling blocks in the

way of a self-educating student of natural history. And there were vicious fishes and hulking birds, and serpents which yawned at the little girl, as if she would just have made one delicate mouthful, crackling like a beccafique at Bordeaux. And there were odd corners full of boarding-pikes, cutlasses, tomahawks and working-tools of a like nature, with which man, whether savage or civil, has for various good reasons, let daylight into his brethren from time immemorial.

But perhaps the grand attraction of this wonderful room, was an immense iron safe, or 'ark,' as the Admiral always chose to call it, upon which the little maiden was never tired of gazing. It had once, I believe, held the books and papers of the family bank. On either side, stood one of the plumed Patagonians, with a shocking

smile upon his engraved face, looking like its guardian demon.

There was a mystery about the whole affair, which quite fascinated Helen. The tawny sentinels, the huge lock, the clanging bolt, the ponderous door—that opened with such a reluctant whine, and which the Admiral himself could scarcely close. What did it all mean?

It meant simply this: that ever since his grand financial disaster, Admiral Mortlake had distrusted every living soul in England, from his co-partners at the St. Mark's bank, down to the very agent who screwed rents out of the Riverwood tenantry. In this ark he kept deposited all his title deeds—when he had any to keep, most of them being, at the time of which I am speaking, in the hands of various mortgagees—all documents of any value, and not unfre-

quently, very large sums in ready money. It amused him to shut the heavy door with a bang, and growl to himself, "Safe bind—safe find! No clerk there, at all events."

Partly out of pure, rough, good-nature, partly perhaps because the inquisitive interest of the little mite was positively amusing, the portal of this iron cavern was unlocked most days for Helen's private amusement. And nothing pleased her better than to plant herself cross-legged upon the carpet, gaze wistfully into its recess, and wonder, as a child will wonder, what it would feel like to be locked up inside till Christmas, with other profitable speculations of a like nature.

It became an old familiar friend. She knew exactly in what corner of the Admiral's writing desk its bright steel

keys were kept, and would have liked above all things to have had a private key of her own, which was plainly not to be thought of. Still, there it stood; a sturdy acquaintance with a sort of magnetic and mysterious influence, the future of which was altogether inscrutable, and may remain so for the present at all events.

It was lucky for Helen that even this savage boudoir was at her disposal. For Mrs. Mortlake was a formidably good woman, and sternly aware of the fact. When we refer to the doings of somebody else, upon some particular occasion, as 'rather too good,' we are not commonly supposed to use words in their primary meaning. And whether any lady can, by any possibility, be too good in reality is a delicate question. But, if such a thing be possible, I should have no hesitation in

saying that Mrs. Mortlake must have been very close to the mark.

From the very first moment that Helen could understand a fact, the tale of an immaculate infancy was diligently dinned into her ears. "I never was naughty, all the time I was little girl," was the pious fib which the child at last began to believe, and to consider what a nice mess she might make of it, if she were weak enough to follow suit.

For, although Mrs. Mortlake in her angelic maturity abundantly fulfilled this early promise, nobody liked her at the Lawn—a fact, which, as we all know, children discover just as soon as their elders. Her goodness was the goodness of a good machine which will grind over you, body and limb, before it will go out of its groove, or give you time to get out of the way. So long as you did as she did—thought

as she thought—and emitted an equally pungent and persistent odour of sanctity all was well. You need only discern between Mr. Muleymist, the curate, who was right, and Mr. Salterton, the rector, who was wrong; be in your pew ten minutes before eleven in the morning, and ten minutes before three in the afternoon upon every Sunday, fast, and festival, throughout the year—encourage all poor parishioners who read your tracts and said your conversation ‘did them good,’ and persecute all who would neither listen to your reproof nor smilingly accept your ready-made flannels—and you took your oar in her boat at once. But the crew, I can tell you, was a picked one; and there was nothing for it but to keep stroke, or be landed, mud or meadow.

Talking about tracts, by the way, Mrs.

Mortlake's mission, you must know, was not only to disseminate, but to create. I dare say you may have sometimes wondered—I have, at all events—whence all the myriad tracts in circulation are actually evolved. It is really a very curious question.

Well then, one flourishing *officina* existed, and may still exist, at Riverwood Lawn. Mrs. Mortlake's themes were drawn from sources wide as life itself, and therefore variegated and various. Sometimes she dealt in hard-headed and argumentative damsels who exchanged logic with the tempter until he modestly admitted his mistake, and disappeared with his hat in his hand. Sometimes in Scipionic policemen, whose rigid and frigid moral philosophy was proof against any temptation at all. Sometimes in serious sailors, who held tobaccoless tea-parties in the forecastle, and

whose conversation was seasoned with nothing stronger than "Bless me!" and "O, my dear!"

But I intend to take an opportunity before long of offering you a specimen of her composition; devoting, if necessary, an entire intercalary chapter to that very purpose.

It was no fault of this excellent person that her inherent dislike to children was intense and ineradicable. She detested them so much that she never had any of her own; and of course the apparition of a little stranger, in the literal sense of the words, for whose care and education she was to be entirely responsible, was anything but an occasion of rejoicing. Granting, however, that, in this particular, her very failings didn't lean to virtue's side, they at least gave her virtues a famous opportunity

of displaying themselves. Many, and probably most of our good deeds derive their principal merit from the amount of self-sacrifice which they involve; and if the care of the friendless little orphan had happened to have been a pleasure rather than the reverse, there would have been but little scope for self-approbation in undertaking it.

Whether other considerations could have had any possible sway with so austere a moralist as Mrs. Mortlake, is more than I can tell. Be this as it may, little Helen's early experience might have suggested to her that she must have done something naughty in her cradle, and been forthwith consigned to a reformatory for the remainder of her life.

For education by way of reward or persuasion was entirely opposed to Mrs. Mort-

lake's principles. People ought to obey because obedience was right, and ought to be punished, if they didn't, because disobedience was wrong. Any other system was, according to her creed, a government by lower motives, and unsuited to the case of a reasonable and accountable baby.

Moreover, lest the said baby should by any means entertain the idea that any particular punishment exceeded the offence, or was indeed more than a rather liberal instalment of what might be expected hereafter, the most tremendous threats and texts were always at her service ; denunciations which, if they conveyed any meaning at all, produced much the same effect as the invocation of the black sweep, or the wicked old man with the bag—familiar long since cashiered in all decent nurseries.

And so the work of education began—

unsatisfactorily enough to both parties ; for Miss Helen was not very docile, and her instructress not very patient. Probably she made the pace rather trying on principle ; as one who perceived that the high authority for not sparing the rod forbade her to allow any precious opportunity to escape unimproved, which seemed to justify a snug little whipping.

And so things went on for a few uncomfortable years, during which Mrs. Mortlake's patience and trimming tackle were alike exhausted ; and Helen's naturally high spirit became so thoroughly chafed and roused, that she disobeyed for disobedience sake. She even horrified that lady one Sunday, between services, by audaciously announcing that she had broken all the ten commandments that very morning and found herself much as usual.

Of course matters couldn't be allowed to continue upon that footing ; and, despite the Admiral's dislike to the incumbrance, a governess was the only resource. Firm, good-humoured guardianship was all that Helen wanted ; and this one would suppose might, by proper exertion, have been readily secured. But with characteristic ineptitude in such matters, Mrs. Mortlake pitched upon Miss Serena Smugg, the protégée of one of her clique.

There had been one naughty child in the house before. There were two now ; for Serena was as cunning a little humbug as ever stepped in crinoline. Mrs. Mortlake thought her perfection, and, for once in their lives, Helen and she were of the same opinion. Serena didn't mind a little teaching, and she taught rather well ; and Helen didn't mind a little learning, and she

learned exceedingly fast. But, a very mild amount of daily business once over, and the governess was only too anxious to be quit of her pupil. She had her own correspondence, which was voluminous, to attend to. She had a thrilling 'Tale of Fashionable Life' fast approaching completion on the sly, in which all the characters were peers and peeresses, whose graceful badinage was for the most part exchanged in boarding-school French.

She was addicted likewise to siestas, which Helen never ventured to disturb; during which visions of spurred and whiskered counts jingling with jewellery and scented like Mr. Rimmel's shop, passed pleasantly in procession—when ladies lovelier than the morning were followed about their corridors by these peeping Toms, who looked unutterable things, and occasionally said

things which would have been much better unuttered—when pages, waiting-women, and satanic valets, all did their best to surpass their employers, and when, in short, the whole machinery of modern aristocratic life in England was at last remorselessly unveiled.

All that she insisted upon was, that she was 'never to hear of' Helen's being naughty; and the young lady very sincerely promised that, if she could help it, she never should. And so Mrs. Mortlake, having washed her hands of the whole affair, gave herself no further trouble whatever about the child. She had the greatest possible confidence, so she assured her own conscience, in Miss Smugg, who had been so highly recommended in the best quarters—who was always so demure and unobtrusive, and whose behaviour in church was enough to

edify anybody. Helen was scarcely reasonable yet. When Miss Smugg had once broken her in, and she had fairly arrived at years of some discretion, then would be the time to resume her task, and trim and train this 'warped slip of the wilderness' into the faultless model which it would be her pride and pleasure ultimately to present to society.

In the meanwhile, one grand point upon which she insisted, was, that Helen should have no playfellows. It was extremely improbable that she would meet with any child brought up half so religiously as herself: and therefore, whilst she might possibly be contaminated, she could scarcely be improved, by chance acquaintances. She had her paragon governess for companion, a gloomy old garden to play in, and a shaggy old pony to ride upon, and there was nothing

in the world to prevent her from being as happy as Mrs. Mortlake herself. Besides which, it was just as well that she should be kept in ignorance, as long as possible, of her own splendid prospects, a glimpse of which could only tend to unsettle her mind. And so the upshot was that Helen became the pet and companion of all the servants, who felt for her lonely estate, and, as they expressed it, did all they knew towards making her a good time.

One morning in August brought round Helen's ninth birthday. If she had learned to look in her glass to any useful purpose, she might have discovered a wonderful little countenance, which gave promise of unusual beauty long before nine more summers should have passed over her head. Nothing could be more perfect than the pure brown complexion and delicately moulded features,

resolute though childish, and stamped with character and originality. But Helen never looked in a glass, nor cared for a reflected fairy face, nor knew by sight her own lithe, graceful figure, nor mused over her pretty hands, unless when exceptionally dirty. And all this bright summer day she had been entirely her own mistress, as was only fit and proper ; and had scampered her pony, and wandered in the garden, and climbed the chesnuts, and fished in the pond : whilst Serena's Lords and Ladies had an equally busy time of it, for the 'assembly' sounded early, and the demure novelist allotted the whole of her idle day to passing them all before her in grand review.

At last Helen's rambles were brought to a disagreeable termination. The little girl managed to tread on a sharp strong thorn of a broken acacia bough, which not only

INTERCALARY CHAPTER.

BETWEEN two successive Acts of a serious opera, we occasionally find, what is described in the bill as a ballet divertissement, interposed with the best effect. After the appalling dagger-work, the unfathomable despair, and the uproarious chorus in which the last scene culminated, it is charming to find ourselves at once amid the innocent gaiety of a happy valley where all the world is dancing. We have really nothing to think about—perhaps the less we think the better—and simply enjoy the spectacle. And, when the ball-music dies away, and the curtain de-

scends upon a sea of smiling eyes and whirling muslin, we are ready to enter with renewed vigour upon the substantial business of the evening.

Well then, let us here interpose the intercalary chapter already promised, with a specimen of Mrs. Mortlake's Tracts served *au naturel* from a large pile of these compositions upon the table before me.

The fact is, she was in the habit of sending a copy of each, as it appeared, to a maiden aunt of mine, who as regularly passed it on, uncut, to Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn. Whether she thought that it was likely to do me more good than she could herself, poor soul, expect from its perusal, or merely got rid of it like a bad shilling which it seemed extravagant to chuck in the fire, I haven't the least idea. Anyhow, here they all are, and to allude to

a delicacy in one's own possession without offering a slice or a glass, is a rudeness of which I am not capable. So I have taken "Abraham Brown, Mariner," from the top of the heap, and beg leave to send the dish in your direction—to taste if you like, and by all means to reject, should you find it untempting.

Perhaps it may give you a more favourable impression of their authoress than you have already received. In that case, I beg you, in all sincerity, to judge of her by her writings rather than by mine. Not only have I no possible motive for misrepresenting her, but now that I come to peruse her works myself for the first time, I begin to think that, in some respects at least, hers must have been a simple case of misdirected energy, and that we may not have seen the best of her yet.

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RIVERWOOD TRACTS. No. 41.
SOME PASSAGES FROM THE LIFE OF
ABRAHAM BROWN,

MARINER,

OR

ALWAYS BE FIRM.

H.M.S. Crocodile was a magnificent frigate of fifty guns, with a crew of five hundred and one men, including the Captain.

Among so great a multitude, it would be idle to conceal the fact that there were many whose days were passed in the careless and unthinking merriment too common among sailors—to whom the flowing bowl and the lively hornpipe offered attractions infinitely greater than those of study and serious meditation.

There was one, however, amid that thoughtless crew, whose conduct was a marked exception to that of the generality

of his mess-mates, And yet he was only a common sailor, and his name, Abraham Brown.

From the very commencement of the voyage to which I now refer, it had been Brown's constant habit to devote a considerable portion of each day to the perusal of various works of a moral and elevating tendency. And, in order to pursue his studies with less prospect of interruption, he usually ascended shortly after breakfast to the main-top-gallant-yard, upon which, with sailor-like ingenuity, he had constructed for himself a tolerably commodious seat or cradle, which in fact he rarely quitted, unless for the purpose of partaking of his regular meals.

I need hardly remark that this unusual course of conduct on board a man-of-war drew upon Brown the ridicule and animad-

version of his less intellectual companions. But Brown was not a man to be diverted either by jeers or threats from the plain path of duty ; and his well-disciplined mind stood him in admirable stead upon these trying occasions, enabling him, in most cases, to refute the charges of his persecutors with so much force and propriety, as to drive them, confused and blushing, from his presence.

It so happened that, as the ship approached the latitude of the Canary Islands, a remarkable change took place in the state of the weather. Instead of the serene and prosperous breezes which they had previously enjoyed, a succession of violent gales from the south-west caused the ship to labour considerably, and rendered Brown's seat upon the main-top-gallant-yard not only inconvenient, but unsafe.

His hat was so frequently blown into the sea, that the Captain at last positively refused to lower a boat again for the purpose of picking it up. The rain wetted his book: the wind curled the pages, and more than once carried away an entire chapter at a time. At last, the yard itself was blown overboard, and Brown only saved by his remarkable dexterity in swimming. Consequently he resolved, if possible, to select a more eligible spot for the pursuit of his studies in future.

Adjoining the large cabin, in which Brown and some two hundred of his comrades were accustomed to repose, was a small but pleasant apartment known as the sail-room. This our hero determined to occupy, after the usual hour of retiring to rest. To apply his mind in the larger dormitory, amid the boisterous merriment and practical pleasant-

ries, which were too frequently prolonged far into the night, was plainly impossible.

The scheme succeeded perfectly. Appropriating to himself one of the candles which were issued to the men for the purposes of their evening toilet, Brown arranged for himself a most comfortable and even luxurious snugger among the sails; and, balancing his candle upon a beam overhead, was enabled to read and meditate undisturbed, until warned by his own sensations of the necessity for retiring to his hammock. This was an inexpressible privilege.

I am sorry to say that no sooner did the Captain and First Lieutenant become aware of the plan which Brown had adopted to secure privacy, than they raised every objection in their power to its fulfilment.

Not that they were insensible to the perfect propriety of his motives, but they were men of routine, incapable of approving any course of conduct inconsistent with the customs of the service.

“Brown!” the Captain would frequently exclaim, “this will really never do. It is even worse than reading in bed. I beg that I may never again find you in the sail-room at these untimely hours, especially with a candle loose upon the beams. We shall all be on fire some night. I am persuaded that it will be so.”

“You should recollect, Brown,” added the First Lieutenant, “that, by this reprehensible practice, you not only expose your own life to risk, but the lives of several hundred valuable men, as well as the safety of one of Her Majesty’s ships. Is it possible that this consideration should have no

weight with one who in point of sobriety and morality is a model to our whole party?"

Brown was firm, but respectful. Study and self-improvement, he assured his officers, were, with him, paramount considerations. In no other part of the ship, and at no other time could he expect to carry out these objects with equal advantage to himself, and consideration for the prejudices of others. The suggested danger from fire was, he observed, purely imaginary, since no one was habitually more careful with a candle than himself.

"Brown, you are provoking!" exclaimed the Captain. "Mr. Barnacle," addressing the First Lieutenant, "be so good as to see that the door of this room is in future locked at nine o'clock. Brown must be taught obedience at any cost. And Brown was left alone.

Strange as it may seem, upon that very night, a sensation of unusual drowsiness overpowered him. He had had hard work upon deck during the day, and his book was rather hard to understand. Between the two he began to nod—gently at first, and then rather more distinctly, until, at last, he forgot himself altogether, and a sudden dive among the sail-racks brought the candle tumbling down his back.

With a frightful start, amid sparks and smoke, and an universal crackle, Abraham Brown awoke to a sense of his situation. Bounding from the sail-room, on fire fore and aft, he escaped by the main hatchway ladder, making the ship ring with outcries, prompted, not by any selfish sense of personal discomfort, but by the desire of apprising his shipmates of a common danger.

For one moment, all was confusion on

board. There was a general rush upon deck. But then the clarion voice of the Captain rang through the darkness, and the discipline of a Queen's ship was vindicated at once, and effectually.

"Hands, away!" shouted the chief officer. "Afterguard! man the flying-jib-boom! Let go the weather-back-stay, and keep her head to the wind! Up with the helm, Quartermaster! Marines! start cartridges into the quarter gallery, and throw all live shell down the main hold! Master-at-arms—send the ship's band into the fore-chains, and let them play 'Jack's Alive' to encourage the men."

Contrary to what might have been expected, these energetic measures were not in the first instance crowned with success. In a few moments a torrent of flame issued from the hatchway, and, flourishing upwards

amid the rigging, actually fired the ensign at the fore-truck.

The light flashed far and wide over the sea. It lit up the foaming waters all around. . . . Spectre-like in that ocean-blaze, like a giant amid the darkness, arose, immediately ahead, the towering Peak of Teneriffe.

Another moment, and the Crocodile would have been crashing and grinding upon that magnificent mountain, her timbers splintered and scattered into ten thousand fragments.

"Down with the helm!" shouted the Captain. "That blessed flare has saved us! But for this most opportune conflagration, we should all have been, at this moment, swimming for our lives, amid the insatiable crowd of carnivorous fishes which infest this most unsatisfactory archipelago.

◆

What in the world can our helm's-man have been thinking of! Was ever such culpable negligence known?

“‘It needeth not that blood be spilt,
For folly to amount to guilt,’

as the poet wisely sings. Ah, Brown! how can we sufficiently thank you?”

Torrents of water from exactly five hundred buckets were rapidly poured down the fore-hatchway. Gradually the flames were mastered, and magnificent volumes of smoke, rolling heavily to leeward, left behind them nothing beyond a pungent and rather unpleasant smell.

“Brown,” exclaimed the Captain, warmly shaking the hand of the common sailor, whom he had summoned for that purpose upon the quarter-deck, “it is to your firmness and good sense that the Crocodile is indebted for this most extraordinary escape.

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Adequately to reward your service is impossible. Fortunately the clerkship of the weather gangway is vacant and at my disposal. The emoluments are considerable, including the sole use of a commodious cabin, telescope, thermometer, and well-selected library. From this moment it is your own. May you enjoy it long. Never was patronage better bestowed."

The British navy is not ungrateful. It cherishes the fame of its thousand heroes. From that day to this, wherever the British ensign waves afloat and the strains of our National Anthem resound along the deep, the initials of our humble friend are preserved in every log. When our officers desire to confer the highest mark of approval upon a sailor whose agility, integrity, and general worth appear to entitle him to distinction, they know no higher encomium

than that conveyed in these simple words :
“Let him be rated as an A. B.”

MORAL. [I have felt myself warranted in removing a sententious and rather indigestible moral appended to the above history, before consigning it to the printer. It is with no feeling of disrespect, or doubts as to the original propriety of the appendage, that we pinch off shrimps' tails at breakfast.]

FINIS .

CHAPTER III.

I WISH it were possible, by dint of mere pen and ink, to give any sufficient idea of Admiral Mortlake engaging his *Times*.

I have described the man himself, as he appeared to our friend Petersfeld, some few chapters back; but there is all the difference in the world between a bull-dog as he appears in the smooth pages of Bingley, and a live bull-dog over a bone.

Nothing could be more savagely picturesque than the rough old tar, clad in the invariable shooting-suit of iron-grey, with

an immense blue choker knotted loosely round his great sandy-whiskered throat. Rolling himself round, in his arm-chair—clutching the paper with both hands—scowling under a pair of enormous eyebrows, that twitched like mice at play, and snorting as he read with that peculiar nasal expletive ‘Hon!’ so characteristic of a Frenchman in a passion, one would have fancied that the editor must have devoted his entire impression to some bitter personal libel, of which he, the reader, was the sole object.

Not a bit of it. Admiral Mortlake read his paper, as he did everything else, under extravagantly high pressure, and all these growls and gesticulations simply signified assent or the contrary to what he was reading. You had only to listen, to hear an approving ‘good!’ snorted out exactly in

the same tone as 'fool—rogue—dolt—liar—hammer-headed baboon!' which obviously implied difference of opinion.

As for Helen, she was so perfectly accustomed to these irregular explosions that she considered them just the natural result of reading the newspaper; and took no more notice of them than did the spaniel, who used to be shown in the lion's den at Wombwell's, of the roar of his royal companion.

Upon this particular occasion, the Admiral chanced to be deep in the details of a great naval court-martial, and had the misfortune to differ from the majority of the court, as well as from certain views expressed in the paper before him. Consequently, upon him, as well as upon Helen, the door opened unexpectedly, and Mr. Salterton was announced.

The Rector of Riverwood, who, it will be recollected, was co-executor with the Admiral of the will of the late Colonel Fleetlands, and, as it were, vice-guardian of little Helen, was a tall, dark, handsome man of fifty, reputed to be the only human being of whom Admiral Mortlake stood in the slightest degree of awe. In truth Mr. Salterton was not quite an ordinary character. Upright as a drill-serjeant, with a reserved and rather dry manner, in which people who saw him for the first time detected hauteur and probable cynicism, he was too self-contained to be universally popular. Perhaps he was a little too fastidious in his likes and dislikes. Perhaps he was overweeningly confident in those terse opinions with which he so briefly disposed of every question which it became necessary to dispose of at all.

Perhaps a rooted and uncompromising aversion to everything which he was pleased to stigmatize as trifling or buffoonery made average people find him ascetic. But, be this as it may, there was no one of whom opinions changed more rapidly, when once, which was not difficult, those who disliked him at first came really to understand the Rector. Then they found a true and kindly heart, with infinitely more practical toleration than they expected.

Mr. Salterton was a widower. A sore calamity had overshadowed him in early life. He had lost his wife within a year of their marriage. An elder sister kept house for him at the Rectory. She was in delicate health, and rarely seen abroad; and it was not until long after the period through which we are now travelling, that Helen became

more than vaguely aware of her existence. Neither will you hear of her again, until the last hours of my story are upon the point of striking—its pageant vanishing into empty air.

Naturally, all the naughty folks in his parish were sorely afraid of him, whilst those of a better mind regarded him as a sort of oracle, a little to be feared, certainly, but not the less upon that account to be equally loved and respected. Mrs. Mortlake, I am afraid, was an exception. Two oracles in the same district were perhaps not likely to agree. At any rate, Mr. Salterton found himself received with so little cordiality at the Lawn, that it was not oftener than once in a year or so, and then almost as a point of ceremony, that he ever entered the gates.

The Admiral had no personal objection to

his clergyman, indeed, he rather liked him than otherwise. But that fatal cloud which had overshadowed his conscience ever since he first seized upon Helen's money as lawful spoil, had made him shy and suspicious. He knew that Salterton himself would have died rather than divert one sixpence of her income to any purpose not expressly calculated in some way to promote her welfare. He expected that the Rector would interfere at last, and in many a moody reverie had mused over the sort of reception with which it would be prudent to encounter the enemy, whenever he advanced to the attack.

Something in the Rector's manner told him that the hour was come.

"Why, Salterton, is that you? Glad to see you, indeed. Take the arm-chair, my dear sir," exclaimed he, in his deep rolling growl, shaking hands with the clergyman

and waving him to a seat with old-fashioned empressement. "Famous weather this, for the crops. Seen the paper to-day—ha? Read the court-martial on John Bonny, master of the *Atalanta*, for running his ship into a French brig off the *Lizard*? Ha, sir! What d'ye think of the egregious land-lubber—the son of a sea-cook, who wrote this precious letter; a fellow, sir, who positively signs himself 'AN OLD TAR.' I'd tar him, sir, and feather him too, till he looked as old as his grandmother. But, perhaps you haven't seen the paper."

"I have not," replied Mr. Salterton with a smile, as he availed himself of the offered arm-chair. "Perhaps it is as well I did not, or I might have been innocent enough to believe the story. By the way, can we have ten minutes' private conversation? I took my chance of finding you disengaged,

but if it is otherwise, I will drop in some other day."

"Not at all, my dear sir. I am at your service as long as you please. We are alone, and not likely to be disturbed—ha!"

Poor Helen literally quivered all over with excitement. The little blood-bedabbled sock could not be drawn on in a moment, and even, had that been possible, the shoe was mislaid on a chair. To hop out of the window, with the certainty of being instantly called back in her dismal pickle, was not to be thought of. So she scuttled under the table like a lame rabbit, hoping to goodness-gracious, that nobody would think it necessary to search the room before this awful conversation began.

"Admiral," said the Rector, after a moment's pause, "I want to have a few words with you about your ward, Miss Fleetlands.

I should be the last person, as you may suppose, to intrude officiously anywhere. But as I stand in a peculiar position with regard to the little girl, and next to yourself, am the person most responsible for her, you will pardon me if I speak plainly, and without reserve."

"That's what I do myself," replied the Admiral with a slight snort; "and what's more, stow all palaver before I begin. If you are anxious to take any responsibility off my shoulders, why, sir, you are heartily welcome. Hitherto, I have been under the impression, right or wrong, that I was accountable to the High Court of Chancery, and to that court alone, as regarded all matters connected with the care and custody of my ward. That, sir, subject to correction, was my belief," concluded the master of Riverwood, working his shoulders and

twitching his brows, preparatory to going into argument upon the question.

"You are quite right," replied Mr. Salterton, quietly playing with his riding whip. "Your discretion can be controlled only by the Court of Chancery, which of course would not interfere unless in an extreme case."

"I presume not, sir. And now, if you would favour me with a little of that plain speaking which you were so good as to promise me a moment ago, I shall probably have the honour of understanding your meaning. Sir, you have my fullest attention."

"Plainly, then," resumed the Rector, in a dry, decided tone, "it seems to me—speaking merely as a spectator—that you are in some danger of inviting the interference of this Court of Chancery. Is it right, Admiral, that at her age, Miss Fleetlands should

be allowed to run wild about the place, with no more suitable companions than your groom and gardener. Of Miss Smugg, who is, I believe, supposed to have charge of her, I wish to say nothing. Whatever her qualifications may be, they have been most unfortunately applied in this case. I know, from my own conversations with the child, that her education, both religious and otherwise, has been strangely neglected. Positively I am ashamed of her as a parishioner. There is not a child of six years old in my school, yonder, who is not far better acquainted with her Bible, and at least equally well read in history. And all this with a girl who, in the course of a few short years, will probably be the richest heiress in the county! All this with a girl whose father left the munificent sum of five hundred pounds a-year from her very babyhood—for

what purpose, in the name of common sense? Surely that she might receive the very best education which money could purchase—that she should have every proper luxury, every elegance and advantage which wealth could bestow—carriage exercise, for example; change of scene, real sea-side pleasures, and most of all, companions and play-fellows of her own age and position. I think, Admiral, that might be about the view the Court would take, were its attention drawn to the matter.”

“My—goodness—gracious—me!” gasped Helen, trying desperately to screw herself up into nothing at all, “only think of my being somebody else all this time, and not knowing it! O, this is better than anything Serena ever invented, and it’s true besides. My stars, don’t I wish the carriage full of play-fellows would drive up! Richest

heiress in the county! Why, I shall marry a king's son or somebody. Go on, Mr. Clergyman—go on!”

“Now,” pursued the Rector, “I have delivered my mind. Not prematurely, at all events, for I have waited long after my conscience bade me interpose, in the hope that such a step would become unnecessary. But Helen is just now at the most critical point of life, and I dared not hesitate longer. There is only one other point,” concluded the Rector, “to which I will advert whilst upon the subject. No one, in his senses, will suppose that you would attempt to divert money especially devoted in trust for a particular purpose, to any other use. But let me remind you that to attempt to lay by any portion of your ward's income for her future benefit, is perfectly idle. With her magnificent prospects, any possible present

saving, would count for nothing at all; while, just now, every sixpence might be laid out to her great advantage, both immediate and prospective. I know you too well, Admiral, to doubt your perfect honour as regards motive. If we differ upon a point of expediency, I am sorry."

"Sir," retorted the Admiral, who had risen restlessly from his chair, and, with his fists buried two feet deep in his trouser pockets, appeared to be inscribing hieroglyphics with his chin upon some invisible pyramid, "Sir, I am obliged to you. Say no more, sir; say no more, ha!"

"O, mercy!" thought Helen, who, crouched in her snug recess, had been devouring every word, "This is much too dreadful. I never heard him in such a rage in all my born days. They'll fight a battle as sure as I'm alive."

"Fortunately, I have no more to say," replied Mr. Salterton. "I have spoken my mind, and, I believe, discharged my duty, certainly without the remotest intention of giving offence."

"I am willing to take your word for it, sir. But let me tell you that I will be answerable to the Lord Chancellor, and to the Lord Chancellor alone, as regards all that may concern my ward. I do not meddle, sir, in other people's affairs, myself. I do not catechise their children in private; neither do I presume to pass an opinion upon their expenditure or mode of living. I do not insinuate, either directly or indirectly, that they may be making a purse out of moneys entrusted to their care; and, by Heaven, I think that mine's the best way, sir, ha?"

"All right!" returned the Rector good-

humouredly. "Don't trouble yourself to be civil now. Next time you pass the Rectory, look in and tell us there are no bones broke. Good day, Admiral."

I am afraid that the gruff 'good day' of the latter was supplemented so soon as his visitor was fairly out of hearing, by a thundering roll of maledictions, in which parson, ward, and five hundred a-year, were severally consigned *sine die* to Jericho, and several stations beyond. As for poor little Helen, the whole transaction had risen into a hideous tangle of utter bewilderment and terror. Why she was included in the anathema, and what babe-in-the-wood end might be in store for her, were puzzles too terrible to attempt.

"Thank goodness, he's firing off his pipe!" was her first consolation. "Now he'll go out and smoke upon the terrace. That's all

right; for I'm tired of being scrunched up here. It's as bad as being in church—only I've heard something worth hearing. Don't I wish Gi had been with me, under the table. Gi would have understood it all in no time. I must talk it all over with Gi."

'Gi,' you must know, was the pet name of an elderly young man, who had been groom at Riverwood for something under forty years, and for whom Helen indulged a profound affection. That he could play sphynx upon occasion, seems likely.

The young lady was, however, right in her conjecture. Her guardian, after deliberately lighting his meerschaum, strolled forth upon the terrace, leaving Helen free to shoe herself, and escape undetected. But what the savage old smoker thought of himself, as he paced moodily backwards and forwards under the statues, is more than I can tell.

I suppose he felt as many of us have felt who have been told unwelcome truths, in our time, and made strange fools of ourselves, by way of acknowledgment. I daresay he wondered whether Salterton was really in earnest, and what was after all the law of the matter. That such a comparative trifle as five hundred a-year should stand between himself and virtual ruin, was the bitterest part of the business. Yet so it was: whilst, if Helen's accounts were to be overhauled, and he made answerable for the excess of the last seven years receipts over his expenditure upon her account during the same time, there would be nothing for it but to put the shutters up, and go and live on the Continent.

Whatever course of procedure with reference to his ward might otherwise have been adopted by the Admiral, an immediate

change, in the way of education, was rendered necessary by the sudden disappearance of Miss Smugg.

That gifted and unfortunate damsel, among other treasures of periodical literature, had unluckily lighted upon one of those detestable publications which profess to afford 'a medium of intercommunication' between young ladies and gentlemen capable of committing matrimony in cool blood. "Gustavus Alonzo, dark and aristocratic-looking,"—so ran the precious announcement which one day attracted her attention—"eldest son of a country baronet, and heir to a landed estate of many thousands a year, was in search of a handsome, lively partner, fond of music and dancing, and not over twenty-three." Peculiar domestic difficulties, combined with constitutional diffidence, prevented him from making his

wishes known among the brilliant circles of his own acquaintance, and drove him with reluctance to advertise in a penny paper. He would gladly exchange *cartes de visite* with any young lady who would so far lay aside the conventionalities of rank and fashion as to condescend to answer through the same channel, with a view of adorning what he rather mystically alluded to as his future coronet, and gilding with her constant smile an existence of lonely and luxurious ennui.

Serena jumped at the news. The good time, for which she had so long been pining, was come at last; supposing it possible that such a chance should not have been accepted and closed with before the paper which contained it was fairly dry from the press. So her answer was written at once on bright pink note, in a lovely lady-like hand, en-

closing a photograph of herself in a low evening dress, reclining in a bower of roses, with a crook and a guitar, and some sheep picking at her petticoats. And, fearing, I suppose, lest her Smugg patronymic should be considered homely among the family of her future lord, she quietly evaded comment by subscribing herself "yours most fervently, Serenissima Southamptontowers."

In her case at least, the course of true love appeared likely to run as smoothly as could be wished. The return post brought an answer from Gustavus Alonzo, expressing the respectful hope that Miss Southamptontowers could make it convenient to be in Rotten Row at six p.m. on the following Friday, when that young gentleman would appear, mounted on a thoroughbred chesnut, and followed by a groom in blue livery, with a cockade in his hat. Would Miss

Southamptontowers kindly carry a scarlet geranium ; at the sight of which Gustavus Alonzo would immediately dismount, and indulge himself with an interview which he fondly trusted was to be the turning point of his existence ?

Alas for poor Serena. She made some frightfully fabulous excuse for a visit to London, and flourished her geranium unsuccessfully before a great many gentlemen. At last a rakish-looking youth sidled up ; and pointing out as his father the baronet, an innocent old stock-broker, who was cantering towards Apsley House, announced himself as the Gustavus Alonzo of the advertisement. His horse had unluckily fallen lame, not five minutes before, and had to be led home by his groom, which accounted for his appearance *au pied*. Would Miss Southamptontowers condescend

to excuse an accident, and avail herself of apartments at his disposal in Carnaby Street—a sort of family appanage, in charge of an old housekeeper, a pensioner of twenty years standing. She would do her best to make Miss Southamptontowers comfortable after the fatigue of her journey, until her future mother-in-law could be prepared to receive her in the morning.

By what extraordinary fatuity Serena fell into this open vulgar trap, it would seem at first sight impossible to conjecture. Yet, would to Heaven that it were extraordinary after all! Such things happened yesterday—they are happening even whilst I write these words, and they will happen to-morrow and to-morrow, so long as the world endures. It is a mystery, and a dreadful one. Enough that from that day to this—from thenceforth, from henceforth, and for ever, poor

Serena's name never was or will be heard of on earth again.

Her disappearance was not perhaps absolutely unwelcome to Admiral Mortlake. It gave him the opportunity of making an entire change in Helen's course of education, without the appearance of having been bullied by his Rector. It was quite clear that the best thing he could do with her was to send her to school; a conclusion in which his wife cordially agreed. So in the course of a few weeks Helen found herself transferred to the intensely select and fashionable establishment of the Misses Magnolia, of Luxor Court, Palmyra Stairs, Brighton, where for the modest consideration of some two hundred guineas per annum, she was guaranteed not only the usual education of a young lady, but that last unutterable polish, which, unlike certain

other Christian graces, is only to be had for money.

It had seemed better, all things considered, to do the business handsomely, so as not to leave the slightest loop-hole for further cavil.

CHAPTER IV.

SEVEN years is a long time—a large slice out of one's existence. Physiologists, I believe, tell us that in seven years we change altogether, body and bones; and that the suit of mortality which we wore at the beginning of the era, is, before its conclusion, replaced by one entirely different. If this be the case, I can only say that I suspect I have either been overlooked altogether, or repaired with second-hand material, and would give a trifle to have my old suit returned in anything like the condition I once knew it.

Seven years is a long time. So long in fact, that when in the regular course of a narrative it becomes necessary to dispose of it in a sentence, there is always a certain feeling of responsibility and compunction. Nevertheless, seven years and upwards have passed away since the date of my last chapter, and the day arrived on which Helen was to take leave of the Misses Magnolia and their fashionable academy for ever.

Vividly as, at this moment, I seem to see her before me in all the elastic health and beauty of seventeen, I am perfectly conscious of my inability to transfer to print what I most wish to be understood, or to place before another imagination exactly the image which is present to my own. I had some thoughts of prefixing a photograph to this volume. But that, I am told would look lazy and eccentric, and were better avoided.

So, to the clearest imaginable olive complexion, with just a fair tinge of colour, you may add a straight, pretty nose, and the firmest yet most delicate little mouth and chin which your recollection is able to supply. Dark and glossy and luxuriant was Helen's hair, parted smoothly over her bright brow, and harmonising with eyes that looked almost melancholy while at rest, and flashed so instantly and wonderfully whenever there was an excuse for flashing at all. A buoyant graceful figure, rather full, I suppose, than the reverse, and charming hands must complete my portrait. I am not sketching, or intending to sketch, a beauty, though in my opinion Helen had a perfect right to the title, but something far better—a form to which one's soul goes rushing forth, because though it may be only clay after all, it is not merely a painted

vase. There is light within the porcelain—real living light. Happy the man to whom God has given such a lamp. In the dark and desolate places of this wilderness it is the gift beyond all price.

Seven years had also passed over the Admiral, since the day that he growled so famously at his Rector for interfering about little Helen. Nor had those years been quite unprofitable. The old fellow had grown decidedly less morose and more sociably disposed. Some of us mellow—some harden with time; and if Admiral Mortlake's life could only have been prolonged for another half century, he might have grown into an affable and benignant elderly gentleman with a smile and a present for every visitor.

Perhaps this favourable change was partly owing to a good round legacy, which dropped

in when least expected, and placed him, all at once, in comparative ease in his possessions. But at any rate, it was so marked as to be a subject of rejoicing to Helen when she at last returned to take up her residence at Riverwood for good.

And how are we to suppose that Admiral Mortlake felt towards the frank, handsome girl, who stood before him, no longer a little toy to be teased or petted according to his humour—but erect in crinoline, ready to ride his horses, grace his dinner table, and flirt with his guests whenever he gave her the chance? I will tell you my own belief upon the subject, which you may take for what it is worth. Only since it has fallen upon me to write the story, you may perhaps as well believe that I am not very far wrong, and accept it as part of the narrative.

I suspect that Admiral Mortlake's feeling

with regard to his ward was essentially selfish. I mean, that although he had been amused with her as a child, and glad when her school-holidays came round, he liked her for his own sake, rather than her's. It was pleasant to see her sunny face in the garden, and to hear her voice upon the stairs. She was the life and ornament of that dull old house, and he was well aware of the fact. Still, he never considered her as his own; he never thought of her as we think of those fledglings, who, if they are not to live with us for ever, are never, as we hope, to forget the old birds and the parent nest. Helen would marry, of course, in due time, and so pass away. He would be sorry to lose her, and upon that account alone would, as long as possible, postpone the evil day. But as to any further regard for her, I don't think it was in his nature. She was his to-day, and

would be another's to-morrow—and there the connection would end, so far as he was concerned.

There was, however, one other consideration involved in the contingency of Helen's marriage, which had so deep an influence over his mind, that I must refer to it in this place as the key, in some measure at least, to the remainder of my story.

It was briefly this. So long as Helen continued in his guardianship, and remained unmarried, he received, as we are aware, under her father's will, five hundred a-year for her maintenance and education. Now it was a simple matter of arithmetic that, during the seventeen years of her life, he had received, at the very lowest estimate, upwards of £5000 sterling in excess of what she could by any possibility be supposed to have cost him in money out of pocket. To

be called over the coals to the tune of such a balance, was a hideous prospect, and to be by all means averted, if that might be.

Supposing that she remained single up to twenty-one, there would probably be but little difficulty about the matter. She would then be competent to give, and in the ordinary course of events would give, what is technically termed a release in full. In other words, she would sign and place her forefinger upon the wafer of a parchment deed, the concluding paragraph of which would perhaps run as follows:—

“ And whereas for the satisfaction of the
 “ said Hercules Mortlake and in consider-
 “ ation of the premises she the said Helen
 “ Fleetlands hath agreed to execute to him
 “ the said Hercules Mortlake such a release
 “ as is hereinafter contained Now THIS
 “ INDENTURE WITNESSETH that in pursuance

108 FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

“ of the said agreement and in consideration
“ of the premises She the said Helen Fleet-
“ lands hath remised released and for ever
“ quit-claimed and by these presents doth
“ remise release and for ever quit-claim the
“ said Hercules Mortlake his heirs executors
“ and administrators from all and all manner
“ of action and actions causes of action suits
“ controversies differences debts accounts
“ reckonings sum and sums of money and
“ all other claims and demands whatsoever
“ both at law and in equity for or by reason
“ or on account of the said annual sum of
“ £500 so received by him the said Hercules
“ Mortlake as aforesaid or any part thereof or
“ for or by reason or on account of the pay-
“ ment application or appropriation thereof
“ or of any part thereof by him the said
“ Hercules Mortlake or for or by reason or
“ on account of any other act deed matter

“ or thing by him done committed or per-
 “ mitted in anywise relating to the pre-
 “ mises.”

This succinct little document, assuming it to be freely given, and after a fair explanation of the state of the case, would operate to silence all possible demands, square all accounts, and spare her guardian all further trouble in the matter.

But, in the event of her marrying under twenty-one, this smooth and easy course would unfortunately be inappropriate. Until that mystical birthday, we are all infants in the eye of the law—undiscerning babes, unfit to ‘reckon,’ or to cast up the mildest sum in compound addition by which our interests may be prejudicially affected. I have, it is true, known one or two infant senior wranglers in my time; but they would have been good-naturedly repressed

in the Court of Chancery, had they come there armed with the pence-table, or trusting in the rule-of-three.

Consequently, in the case just supposed, Helen's accounts would be liable to be overhauled under the direction of the Court itself; whilst her intended, if of a greedy turn, and given to seeking his own, would be in a position to ask questions which might easily become vexatious. I am not asserting that the Admiral, under the circumstances, could actually have been called upon to refund. I volunteer no opinion whatever. He never consulted me; and perhaps felt a difficulty in taking direct legal advice upon so delicate a topic. It was enough to know that the money was most certainly never intended as a mere present to himself, to be tormented with fears of reprisal.

It is not, therefore, much to be wondered

at that he had long since resolved to take the one short cut towards stopping all nonsense of the above description. Under her father's will he was empowered to withhold consent to his ward's marriage up to twenty-three. Upon marriage without such consent, her whole property became virtually confiscated.

This power he was determined to exercise, and made no secret of the matter. He even, I am sorry to say, gave out that he had the best reasons for believing that Colonel Fleetlands' last and most anxious wish had been, that his daughter should not marry before twenty-three at earliest, and that he should hold himself bound to respect this desire, so far as his own conduct in the trust was concerned. Of course this was simply a falsehood, and even if true as an assertion, would have carried with it no

legal weight whatever ; but it gave convenient vantage-ground in the event of his being scouted as an obstinate, impracticable donkey, when he stood upon the letter of his rights.

I don't say that Colonel Fleetlands was wrong in the disposition which he made. Naturally, in the circumstances under which he died, he was anxious to protect his daughter from being run away with, whilst yet a girl, by any rascal who only coveted her money. A controlling power in this respect must have been vested in somebody, and every controlling power is, in its nature, susceptible of abuse. In all cases of this kind, we must select the most reliable people we know, and after that, 'quis custodiet custodem ?' is a question more easily asked than answered.

To return to our story. With Helen

once again established at Riverwood, the Admiral's first desire was to disabuse the neighbourhood of the impression that his own conduct towards her bore the slightest trace of mercenary or unworthy motives—in fact, to convince them magnificently of their mistake. Helen was now, as he perceived, too old to be kept in a corner, being indeed the object of curiosity and speculation to half the county. Appearances must be kept up at all costs—even of that priceless convenience, ready money.

Helen's grand passion was riding. The horse to her mind outweighed all that creation ever did in the way of hair, scale, fur or feather. She had been allowed riding lessons at Brighton, as part of the Misses Magnolia's gorgeous curriculum, and of course now hoped for a steed of her own.

To her intense delight and astonishment,

her guardian one day presented her with as lovely a blood-mare as could be bought for money—so the dealer had told him, and so I hope he believed—and placed Gigoggin the groom at her disposal, to follow her whither she listed. This was life itself to Helen. To regale her pet with toast and lump sugar after breakfast, to gallop her unmercifully all day, and dream about her religiously at night, made a division of time which was perfectly enchanting. She began to wonder that she had ever reviled River-wood to her school-fellows as a dismally owlsh, mopey old place, and wished she could show them Camilla.

Gigoggin, alias Gi, the fortunate youth who was commissioned as Miss Helen's aide-de-camp and knight companion in her equestrian expeditions, was a small, brown, taciturn man, who had probably been young

in his time, and was still rejoicing in that perennial bloom which, in former days, we used so often to notice among post-boys. He was quite devoted to his young mistress, having, in fact, as we are already aware, been Helen's earliest friend on the premises, and admired her riding as an accomplishment of his own creation. He would have given his ears any day to see her follow the hounds—a performance which, being strictly prohibited, she looked forward to, as the very climax of human enjoyment. And his cautionary “'Ware hounds, Miss Helen!” when Camilla pricked her ears to the distant music, and the girl, who seemed to be pulling so desperately, was away like the wind, before he could even kick Happy-go-lucky into a canter,—came from the depths of a sorrowful and sympathising heart.

By dint of continued badgering, you may make most people admit that you are in the right, or at all events consent to your wishes, which is still more satisfactory. And so it came to pass that the Admiral at length gave way in his objection to Helen's taking her gallop in the hunting field, the more so as the discussion had suggested an idea to his mind, for which he gave himself infinite credit.

It occurred to him that an opportunity now presented itself, by which—without the smallest sacrifice of his own self-complacency—he might at once put himself upon a more cordial footing with people whom he had been foolish enough to estrange. It would, moreover, display his liberality and kindness to Helen, in a picturesque and valuable light, and lastly, would be the correct thing to do by her, if he intended to allow her to

hunt at all. He determined that the very next day the hounds met in his neighbourhood, he would invite the Master to breakfast at the Lawn, and to bring his field with him.

It was a capital notion, and seemed better and better the more it was reflected upon. The Windmill Turnpike, on the London Road, was in due course announced as next Thursday's meet, and in answer to the Admiral's invitation, Sir Philip Chevy replied, that he would with pleasure do himself the honour of bringing his hounds to the Lawn at ten upon that day, and draw the Riverwood spinney into the bargain.

Whatever the Admiral undertook, was sure to be executed in good earnest, and the very idea of this jolly *déjeuner à la chasse*, made him ten years younger at once. The 'Master's eye,' as we all know, is prover-

bially efficacious, and although—to employ a slang caution—I would advise him to mind it, when engaged in kitchen investigations, it certainly did its duty in the present instance. Nothing was too minute, nothing too palpably beyond its province to be secure from incessant supervision. One moment beheld its owner re-arranging the garniture of a ham ; the next assuring himself that a due proportion of port wine and oysters were combined in the principal pie. And all this while cross-catechising his footman like a thief, as to the disposable amount of plate, and how it would make out breakfast covers for thirty ; and writing to Fortnum and Mason for terrines, caviare and canvas backs, and to Liquorpond Street for a kilderkin of such malt as should rejoice the cockles of the huntsman, and such of the farmers and yeomen, as could not be

provided for in the dining-room. In short, if he had been planning some grand naval 'affair,' in which details they say, are half the battle, he couldn't have been expected to do his duty more conscientiously than while plotting this memorable breakfast.

I am glad that I am not a fox. I should hate being chevied, more than tongue can tell. But if I had been born to such experience, and had happened to be the denizen of the Riverwood spinney when that Thursday came round, I must say I should have reckoned upon an easy bargain. I wouldn't be too hard upon anybody. But I know an ugly ditch or so, and a few nasty stiles, and a quiet bit of wire in the neighbourhood, and I should like to have taken my friends round that way. I think that with the assistance of that kilderkin of XXX, let alone the cider cup upon the high hall

table, I could have emptied a saddle or two, and postponed indefinitely that spasmodic moment which survivors so complacently refer to as 'the finish.'

If you ask me what Mrs. Mortlake thought of the approaching saturnalia, I am obliged to confess that the subject is altogether beyond me. I suspect that she considered fox-hunting as too shameless a branch of scarlet wickedness to need a verse to itself in the commination service. I dare say that she had delivered her mind to the Admiral upon the matter of allowing Helen to take such a palpably short cut to perdition, and I can fancy the grunt she got in reply. I can also fancy the sour odour of sanctity under cover of which she washed her hands of a bad business, and with the rather promiscuous consolation that evil was probably permitted for some useful purpose,

allowed the backsliders to slide, and Helen to go to the—dogs.

The important morning arrived at last. Nothing could look more successful than the dining-room at Riverwood, arrayed for a hunting breakfast. It was a large square room, wainscotted in solid oak, with a handsome panelled ceiling, and hung with time-honoured portraits of the dons and heroes of the house of Mortlake. The hearth was ample and old-fashioned, and, with its ponderous log of dry timber, made hospitable music of roar and crackle, lighting up the room with a pleasant glow, and touching the glass, and silver, and holly, upon the breakfast tables, with good-natured glancing light. The Admiral was more than satisfied.

“Ha—hum!” he growled, as, with his hands in his pockets, and Helen at his side, he stood surveying the preparations, an hour

before breakfast-time. "This looks about the right thing, Helen. I don't see how it could have been made much better—hey? I wonder how many of these fellows will come. We could manage with forty; and I'll be bound that forty wouldn't get to the bottom of that pie. I wonder if we shall find anybody man enough to drink sack of a morning. That sack, Helen, in those black bottles over yonder, was in Riverwood cellars before I was born—and that's a year or two ago—hum! What says old Sir John Falstaff—ha? 'If I had a thousand sons, the first human principle I would teach them should be to forswear thin potations, and addict themselves to sack.' Hey! There were men in those days, who knew what breakfast ought to be. No slops and decoctions for them, I'll be bound—only fit for old women under physic. Now, look Helen.

You'll sit here, at this table, and pour out coffee. Keep your eye open, and tell me if you see anything wanting. Call out at once—never mind who hears. There'll be coffee at the sideboard for the people over yonder. Is that vase your filling? Ha! you've made a pretty thing of the holly. Now, I suppose you want to go and sugar your horse. Good for his coat, eh? Well, away with you, and send your groom round if you see him. It'll be all plain sailing enough to-day, I'll be bound; but I may as well give him his course. And take care you're back in the hall by ten exactly—before anybody comes. Do you hear. Mind that!"

With this imperative duty twice impressed upon her mind, Helen took her way towards the stables. It was a soft, mild, January morning, with a grey mottled sky, and a delicious air. Outside, as well as

within the house, were something more than promises of good cheer. The trebly X'd kilderkin stood trestled upon the terrace, garlanded with holly, and surrounded by tables flashing with brand new pewters. These, with the mighty loaves of home-made bread, the mill-stone cheeses, the round and the sirloin, the sheaves of tobacco-pipes, and many other good things, were for the benefit of the huntsman and whips, as well as of chance comers, if any, who might be afflicted with Sancho Panza's dislike to feasting in company. It was to be a great day, and nothing could be more promising than its dawn.

Through these preparations Helen passed, wishing, perhaps, that she had learned to drink beer, which seemed so essential a part of a day's enjoyment. She was amused by all she saw. She looked forward to the

breakfast as great fun, and to the draw and gallop afterwards, as untold pleasure. And yet there was something beyond this in her mind; something that seemed to wander amid those mysterious recesses in which spontaneous thoughts arise and often make themselves distinctly felt, long before they can be grasped and moulded by the mechanism of the brain. What it was, she could not have told us, neither can I. But I do not, and will not, believe that the great events of our lives come down upon us without warning. We know not how the tidings are carried, but I am certain there is a whisper always. Drowned and disregarded at the moment—neglected and forgotten afterwards, it may be; but depend upon this, that you never went forth from your house upon the morning when some crowning chance, whether of good or ill

was to befall you, without that prophetic whisper.

Is this what you call being superstitious?

What do you mean by the term? I confess to being 'stitious,' if that will do; but I object to being saddled with a superlative.

CHAPTER V.

RATHER to Helen's surprise—certainly to her great delight—the very first person whom she encountered upon her way to the stables, was Mr. Salterton.

If he had, as may be recollected, withstood the Admiral in former days, upon the question of her own education, all difference upon that score had long since blown over, and he had been specially invited to look in and say grace on that particular morning.

“So you expected me, I see,” said he, playfully laying hold of Helen's little sugar-laden fist. How good of you to bring me

such a treat! such beautiful large lumps too!"

"O, yes, they are all for you, Mr. Salterton," returned Helen, laughing, "all except one, which you won't be so greedy as not to leave for Camilla. I am on my way to pay her my regular morning visit. Come and see her. There! do you hear that neigh? Yes, we are coming, Camilla, coming, coming! She knows my step perfectly. Look, there's her pretty little nose peeping through the bars of the loose box. O, there you are, Gigoggin. Open the door, please, and take off her cloth. Now, isn't she a beauty, Mr. Salterton? No, darling, I have not forgotten your sugar. Here it is! Now arch your neck, and show your handsome crest. Feel it, Mr. Salterton; it is as firm as a racer's, and her coat is as soft as satin. And her colour. I do love that rich dark brown.

The star on her forehead, and that white hind foot, help to show it off. Did you ever see anything so soft and gentle as her eye, yet with a wild glance in it, too, like a deer's? You should see it when she is excited by a good gallop. Ah! you may look at her legs and dainty little feet, as much as you please. She has been too well cared for, to show any signs of work there. Are you thinking her rather tall for a lady's horse? Oh, no—only fifteen three, and she measures high. Some people don't like so much fall behind the withers, but I think it charming—it helps to keep the saddle back, and you can guess what easy paces she has, with that good sloping shoulder. She is thoroughbred: you will find her name and lineage in the stud-book; but she was too wise to run well as a racer, and so she came to me to be my darling, and to obey my voice

and hand as she will those of nobody else.

“There—that’s all !” concluded Helen, as Camilla disposed of the last lump, and eagerly pushed her nose into the bosom of her mistress’ riding habit, having, apparently, some theory of her own upon the subject of pockets. “No more, my pet: no more ! What an affectionate creature a horse is, Mr. Salterton. I don’t know any animal that shows its love for one in so expressive a way. Just look at her eye, now.”

“To judge from what I have just seen,” replied the Rector, “your mare has very good reasons for being affectionate. If I got as much petting and coaxing myself, you’ve no idea how nice I should look in return. Don’t laugh, but try me.”

“Ah, that reminds me of one of Leech’s

sketches that I was looking at last night. A lady is leading an immensely fat pampered spaniel by a ribbon. A costermonger passing by, observes to his companion, 'Now, I dare say, Bill, that 'ere beast of a dawg is a good deal more petted than you or I should be !' "

"Thank you ! That is a compliment and no mistake. I remember it, however. It is one of Leech's many bits of genuine humour. Can you tell me what it is exactly in the costermonger's remark that makes one smile ? I will give you another instance from the same pencil. It is headed 'Disagreeable Truth.' A sentry, on duty at Buckingham Palace, says to a couple of little street urchins, 'Now then, you must move away from here.' 'Ah, but you mustn't, old fellow !' reply the young scamps. Now these designs are both

admirable. Both are in the highest degree diverting; but analyze them, and you will find that they are so for perfectly distinct reasons. The costermonger need not have been far wrong in his premises, although lamentably unlucky in the conclusion which produced his remark. The little boy simply employed a false antithesis which resulted in a lucky jingle, embodying an unexpected home thrust. You may get no bad lesson in logic out of the pages of Leech."

They had turned away from the stables and were strolling along the broad walk at the back of the house. Mr. Salterton had seen Helen frequently since her return, but something in her bright fresh look of youth and loveliness struck him particularly that morning. Perhaps the riding habit set off her beautiful figure to more advantage than usual. Perhaps the excitement of the com-

ing breakfast, and of the glorious gallop which was to follow—her first day of riding to hounds, lit up her countenance with more than ordinary animation. He was not a man given to compliments, but he could not for the life of him help saying, “Do you know, Helen, I can’t take my eyes off you, this morning. I think I never saw you looking so well and charming. I hope you are as happy as you look.”

“Indeed, I am, Mr. Salterton. I have no reason to be otherwise. Do you know I was dreadfully sorry, at first, to leave Brighton for good. I cried right out when it came to the kissing at last. I thought I should be so frightfully lonely here; and there were many girls that I cared about a great deal. I knew the Admiral would never ask them here, you see, and that made it worse. But he has been very kind

to me ever since I came back, and, now that I've got Camilla, I don't feel in the least forlorn. I hope you don't think it's wrong to hunt, Mr. Salterton?"

"Not in the least, my dear, or I shouldn't have been at Riverwood this morning. I should be heartily sorry to see hunting abolished in this country. Of course many people hunt who have no business to do so—but that is all beside the question. To take my own case for example. I should be just as much out of my place in following Sir Philip as he would be in mounting my pulpit. If the Admiral has no objection to your hunting, do so by all means. He seems anxious to give you every indulgence, and I sincerely hope that you may continue happy in his house. You ought to be a great blessing to him; and I believe he is aware of it.

He has a rough manner, and you don't expect much petting I suppose. But if you only choose to go to work with him the right way, which you'll discover much more easily than I should, I'll answer for your making him a great deal fonder of you than even Camilla—rather a triumph I should say in the way of domestication.”

“Mr. Salterton,” said Helen, after a moment's silence, “would you mind my asking you a question? There is something on my mind about the Admiral which I cannot shake off. You will not be displeased at anything I may tell you—will you?”

“My dear child,” replied the Rector, noticing her doubtful and puzzled look, “ask any question you like; and tell me anything in the world. Nothing would delight me more than to have your confid-

ence. Talk to me just as if you were talking to yourself—that's to say if you think I'm discreet enough to be trusted."

"Well then," continued Helen, speaking very slowly, "a long time ago—quite seven years it must be, Mr. Salterton, do you recollect having a conversation with the Admiral about me in his study yonder?"

"Perfectly. Stay, let me think what it was all about. Yes; I believe I remember everything that passed. But, surely, the Admiral never mentioned to you what I then said, Helen. How do you know we talked about *you*?"

"I was under the table all the time."

"The deuce you were!" was the commentary which I am afraid rose to the Rector's lips. Luckily it was suppressed before publication, and he simply said,

"What a good little girl!"

"It was an accident, Mr. Salterton. I had hurt my foot, and lost my shoe. But I heard everything."

"Well, you had better remind me of what was said."

"I think it came to this. I was to have a great deal of money some day; and in the meantime all the allowance my poor papa left me was paid to the Admiral. I understood that—and that, instead of doing what you thought he ought with the money, he was spending everything he could upon himself. You told him he had no right to do so, and made him frightfully angry. Now, from that day to this, Mr. Salterton, I have never felt towards him exactly as I did before. I have never been able to feel quite cordial. And, now that I know more, the gulf appears to grow infinitely wider, and I have a miserable feeling of doubt and

distrust. I wish I hadn't, but I can't help it. I want you to put me right, Mr. Salterton." concluded Helen, rather piteously.

"Were there any children of eight years old at the Misses Magnolias when you left, Helen?"

"O yes—two or three little chits. Why do you ask?"

"Suppose one of these little chits had repeated to you the import—or what she imagined to have been the import—of a business conversation which she had accidentally overheard. Should you have been inclined to take her version exactly for gospel? 'Little miss from under the table *loquitur*.' What would Leech have made her say?"

"O, Mr. Salterton, this is not fair! I can trust myself; and I am trusting you, now."

"I beg your pardon," returned the Rector, feeling, I suspect, a little abashed; "I will answer you as plainly as I would a solicitor. But you said something just this moment about knowing more now. Tell me exactly what you mean, and depend upon it I will be as plain with you."

"Why, just this. Of course, at a girl's school we tell each other all about home, you know."

"I dare say, Helen: although, not having been brought up at one myself, I don't speak from experience."

"Well then, we do. And I told Sophy Hunter, who was my particular friend, all I had discovered; and we had a good deal of talk about it. In short we talked so much that Sophy Hunter, who has an old brother, a barrister, or something of the sort, in

London, said she would ask him to find out the real truth."

"Capital! That was business and no mistake. And pray did Sophy Hunter's old brother enlighten your minds?"

"O dear, yes. You must know, Mr. Salterton, that there's a place near London called 'The Doctor's Common,' where everybody goes to make their wills, and where you may see every will that ever was made by paying a shilling and asking. Well, Sophy Hunter's old brother paid his shilling, and saw my poor papa's will with his own eyes."

"Well?"

"Why, it's just as you told the Admiral, the day I was under the table. I ought to have had five hundred a year ever since I was born, to begin with. And I am to have a whole heap of money when I'm

twenty-one, or twenty-three, or if ever I marry ; only there's some jumble which I don't quite understand, and, if certain things happen, why it seems the Admiral has the right of giving all my fortune to somebody else, and what Sophy Hunter's old brother was very particular about telling was that 'I had better keep a bright look out or the old bloke was cock-sure to chisel me out of my tin.' I wrote the very words down on the back of a French exercise at the time, that I might be certain there was no mistake. It's only slang, of course, Mr. Salterton, but still you see what he means."

"I congratulate you upon the possession of such a valuable legal opinion. You said just now that you wanted to ask me a question. Was it as to whether I was of the same mind with this learned old

brother, or only as to my advice in general?"

"I only want your advice, Mr. Salterton. I want to be put right upon the whole subject. It is so very miserable to distrust those with whom one has to live. And there can be no helplessness like that of feeling that those who ought to help one are interested the other way."

"My dear Helen, I have not the slightest hesitation in offering you my advice, which I earnestly entreat you to follow. When I thought it right, some years ago, to interfere in the manner which you so unfortunately overheard, it was for a twofold reason. In the first place, I was distressed at the manner in which your education was being neglected under the auspices of Miss Smugg, and at the idle uncivilised life which you were then permitted to lead. In the second

place, I certainly felt it my duty to point out to the Admiral that he was receiving a very large sum annually for your care and maintenance, and that it was incumbent upon him to give you corresponding advantages. I think that my interference was not unsuccessful. You have had the benefit, ever since, of one of the first—at all events one of the most expensive—schools in the kingdom. You now appear to have every indulgence which could be wished; indeed, to judge from to-day's proceedings, your guardian has only waited for your return home to make an entire change in his mode of living. As to what Sophy Hunter's old brother told her—forget it altogether. What do you know of him? What reason have you for supposing that he is even competent to divide a biscuit between two puppy-dogs? Can you suppose that I, as one of your

father's executors, would stand by if I suspected that injustice was being done you, or ever will, so long as I have the power to prevent it, permit it to be done? Leave your interests entirely in my hands, Helen, and forget them altogether for the present. And, above all things, never, my dear girl, allow anything in the shape of suspicion to rankle in your mind. Make yourself unhappy, if you must, in any other way you please, but send this sort of feeling to the winds for ever! Upon my honour, Helen, to discover that, at your age, you were indulging a morbid distrust of your Guardian, and wondering whether he stole your money, would give me almost the same sensation as being told that you drank whiskey on the sly."

"O, Mr. Salterton," exclaimed Helen, in rather an unsteady voice, "I didn't quite

mean all I said just now. But thank you so much for all your kindness. I would give anything that the subject had never got into my head. Why can't we pull these things out of our brains, and trample upon them, and walk away?" she concluded, with a half petulant stamp.

"Ah, there you have touched upon a terrible question, which we have no time to discuss now. It is awful to think how things take root in our minds, never to be dislodged again. Sometimes we sow them ourselves—sometimes they seem to be chance-sown, or sown by the enemy. Helen, these weeds are the very bitterness of life. For God's sake guard your own garden whilst you may! But it is getting late. You will be wanted within doors."

"A quarter to ten, still, Mr. Salterton," replied Helen, not unwilling perhaps to

change the subject. "Come and see my country house. It is close by. The Admiral has just had it done up for me, and you can't think how fresh it looks. It will be charming in summer; and, do you know, there is actually a fire-place for cold weather—poker, tongs, and everything! Come and stay with me some day, Mr. Salterton, and I'll order a fire!"

I believe I have already described this rustic lodge in the wilderness, while speaking of Petersfeld's surreptitious visit to Riverwood. A pretty little haunt it looked, and the Rector was amused at Helen's girlish enjoyment of the triumph of possession.

"Now this is my own—my very own, Mr. Salterton, given to me out and out. This is where I intend to entertain my friends from Brighton school, whenever they are

allowed to visit me. Here we shall smoke our pipes and talk politics, and nobody in the world will be allowed to come in except yourself. We have just time for one peep at the inside, which I never allow anybody to see, except people for whom I feel the most particular regard——”

Probably Helen would, not unwillingly, have recalled these last few words, for scarcely had they passed her lips before a young gentleman, in full hunting costume, appeared at the summer-house door.

He could scarcely have been more than two-and-twenty, and might even have been younger, for his was one of those joyous, sunshiny, reckless faces which we can scarcely believe have seen much of this rough world in earnest. His fair complexion was just weather-tanned enough to set off to the best advantage a pair of pleasant blue-grey eyes,

and harmonised well with his bright brown hair. Slenderly, almost slightly built, and perhaps not above what is usually described as the middle height, so firm, quick, and graceful was every movement, that you perceived at once that his training had been athletic, and that of a good school.

And if Nature had been kind in the first instance, it was quite obvious that his tailor had been careful. His pink and cords were the most perfect you ever saw ; new, spotless, and fitting like a pair of gloves. His boots were so pretty that they looked like those one sometimes sees under glass shades in very superior shops, and glittered with a polish which seemed nearly supernatural. All this Helen took in at a glance, with the neat spurs, and little sparkling watch-guard trinkets into the bargain.

Her first impression was one of unqualified

admiration. But at the same moment a suspicion flashed across her mind that he was a fop. She had read about fops frequently, but never seen a clear case for certain—not at all events close enough to talk to: so she listened with eager ears. “He will lisp, I’ll be bound,” she thought, “and that will settle the matter. What makes him smile like that? Can’t he speak?”

All this took place in a single instant, and Helen had not perhaps observed that the smile was directed not at herself, but at her companion, who received the supposed fop with a face of wonder which was amusing.

“Good Heavens, Ferdinand! who’d have thought of seeing you here to-day?” he exclaimed in a tone which struck the young lady as remarkable.

“Not you, evidently, Mr. Salterton,” re-

plied the youngster gaily, as he grasped the Rector's hand. "I beg your pardon for offering a bridle arm, but the doctors won't allow me to shake the other myself, yet; so I musn't ask you to do it for me."

"You are not going to hunt, to-day, surely?"

"O, yes. Why not? I am not going to try anything difficult, you know. I shall make up to some cautious party who opens gates, and we shall get along nicely. I shall explain to him that, in my opinion, going 'cross country is quite dangerous enough to be wicked. We shall agree that every rational enjoyment of hunting can be had by jogging away like a couple of undertakers, without risking our necks among a parcel of lunatics and mad dogs."

"Well, but the arm?—how's the arm going on?"

"O, as right as possible, thank you. It was nothing to signify, after all."

His arm was in a sling, as Helen had noticed, when, after shaking hands with the Rector, he had turned to raise his cap to herself.

"Nothing! God bless the boy! Why I thought the ball went through it?"

"Well, what would you have had, Mr. Salterton? Just about the best thing it could do. But I'm afraid," continued he, "that I ought to apologise for being found where I was. Do you know I tore up Sir Philip's note last night to light a cigar, and forgot the hour for to-day, which I fancied had been half-past nine—and so——"

"Good gracious, I beg your pardon, Helen!" exclaimed the Rector, as if suddenly aroused from a reverie. "What upon earth can I have been thinking about. Let

me introduce Captain Ferdinand Hunsdon, of the Victoria Cross—Miss Fleetlands.”

Helen started at the words, as if she had been shot like the Captain.

Hero-worship is, as we all know, one of the essential elements of the girlish mind. The frightful error of judgment which she had so narrowly escaped committing confused her altogether, and she stood perfectly breathless, with open eyes and lips apart, looking interesting enough certainly, if not unusually wise. Could it be possible that this bright boy, who seemed at first sight the fit Adonis of a fancy-ball, tricked out for an evening in hunting array, had really won the glorious and all-coveted jewel upon a blood-stained field, amid the thunder and tumult of a great battle?

She had a vague impulsive longing to ask him questions; but, without knowing

exactly why, she felt frightened and unable to count upon her own self-control.

Luckily the Rector continued :—

“ Captain Hunsdon, Helen, I hope you are aware, is an old pupil of mine. So I feel a little excusable pride in announcing him.”

“ Were you one of the last made ?” inquired Helen, with a sudden courage. “ I mean, I saw an account in the newspaper some weeks ago of a grand distribution of the Cross—at Southsea, I think.”

“ One of the very last,” replied the young officer, thinking how nice it was to be looked at after that fashion. “ I am glad to see that Miss Fleetlands intends to hunt to-day.”

“ Were you really there ?” persisted Helen with glistening eyes. “ I mean when all the troops were drawn up on Southsea Common, and the whole line presented

arms, and the drums rolled, and the Victory fired? Was that when——”

“That was it, Miss Fleetlands. Do you know that your question reminds me of an odd sort of sensation which came over me at the moment. It was all jolly enough till the old ship joined in; but when, just as we were called to the front, her first heavy ‘bang!’ went sweeping over the ground, it was regularly too much for some of us. I declare I’d have given a pound to have been allowed to use my pocket handkerchief, which is contrary to Queen’s regulations, you know. Can’t say how it was. How should you account for it, Mr. Salterton?”

“I should so like to hear,” interposed Helen, grown quite reckless in her curiosity, “how it was you won the Cross. Do you mind my asking?”

“O, there is very little to tell, I assure you. Besides, I only wear it as representing many better fellows who did more and fared worse. I shouldn’t be here at this moment, but for one of them, who had a far better right to it than I—a fellow who stood over me and got cut to pieces, whilst I escaped with this scratch. I only wish he had lived to wear it.”

“Come, come,” interrupted Mr. Salterton, “if there was to be nothing of this sort, there would be no crosses to wear. And if you expect a civil answer, Helen, don’t ask Captain Hunsdon to tell you what all the world knows, except yourself. But, hark! —what’s that?”

It was the clear, ringing tantara of Sir Philip’s horn, blown by way of announcement, as he entered the Lawn Gates.

Far away, through the shrubbery, they

could distinguish the pack, trailing in like a snake, and a scattering and scampering of pink-coated horsemen.

“My gracious !” exclaimed Helen, “I must run home directly, or I *shall* be in a scrape.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE hunting breakfast was a complete success ; and Helen got credit for the manner in which she behaved as hostess, and conducted the business of her own table. Everybody left the Lawn in good humour ; and, what was more to the purpose, the run which followed proved the most brilliant of the season. A magnificent dog-fox ran his last race, and fulfilled his destiny on that eventful morning. His brush was of course secured for Helen. Sir Philip carried it off to be mounted, and returned it with an ivory handle, bearing her name and the date, engraved upon a tiny silver shield.

But, after all, what do you care—so I hope at least—for these huntsmen and their glorious appetites, or for the fox dead and docked? You are aware that a story-teller never brings two eligible young people together for purposes purely Platonic. You are satisfied that, after a certain amount of variegated experience, a few ups and downs, and an entanglement more or less amusing, Captain Hunsdon and Helen Fleetlands will at last ‘fall out,’ (in a military, not matrimonial sense,) in order to enjoy the large family and prosperous future which are always given away gratis when the play comes to an end. Quite right; and I will not only make you a present of your conjecture, but tell you plainly what were the exact difficulties which stood in the Captain’s way.

You may imagine possibly, as I dare say

you do, that Helen, with her youth, health, and beauty, to say nothing of her many thousands and good social position, would have been a *partie* to whom no demur could possibly have been raised: more probably the object of a general scramble when once fairly in the market. You may suppose, reasonably enough, that if Captain Hunsdon chose to press his suit, and Helen was not wilful enough to say 'no,' the Admiral was the only rock ahead likely to cause trouble. Unfortunately we live in a state of society, which philosophers complain of, as 'highly complicated,' and the working of which is unquestionably mysterious to outsiders. How it came to work unfavourably in the present instance, I will explain at once.

Lord St. Margarets was a widower, with only one surviving child—the youth whose acquaintance we have just made. He was

in popular estimation a very proud man ; and if a vast territory, immense wealth, an historic name, and an ancient coronet—things which no amount of intellect or ability can ever command for anybody—gave any good reason for pride, he was not much to blame. Perhaps, however, we sometimes suppose such people proud, from a confused suspicion as to what our own feelings might be, could we be suddenly placed in their shoes. Sometimes from a natural wish that they would abase themselves to our level, and not walk about as if they were, in fact, what the catechism aggravatingly describes as ‘our betters.’

Be this as it may, one would have fancied that pride itself could scarcely have desired to perpetuate a fairer lot than that which apparently awaited Ferdinand Hunsdon.

Half a million of money, a fair slice of

a southern county, with a title into the bargain, ought to have satisfied Methuselah. One need scarcely be over-frugal to wonder how it was all to be enjoyed in a modern life-time.

Lord St. Margarets had all these things, and was not discontented with his lot. And probably he was the happier for having the one grand wish of his heart still to be satisfied—that of seeing Ferdinand a greater man than himself. The anxious and eventful period at which his boy would naturally look out for a wife, was now coming on. Upon its result all depended. Money he did not care about. A few thousands more or less, could make no sort of difference in his son's position, but the alliance—for which he hoped and prayed—with one of the oldest and noblest families of the em-

pire, was another thing altogether. That was his object.

But the event of the last few months had brought with it higher aspirations even than these. Ferdinand had been encouraged to enter the army rather in accordance with an old family tradition, and as the best possible finish to his education, than with any idea of treating it as a profession. The signal distinction which had so suddenly fallen to his lot, had never entered the calculations of Lord St. Margarets. He woke up one morning to find that his son was a soldier in earnest. Young as he was, he had done a deed of more than mere dash and daring. He had shown a cool judgment, a resolute will, and a power of self-sacrifice which commanded others, in one of the most critical conjunctures which ever tested the mettle of an unfledged subaltern. He had

“done the state some service, and they knew it;” a service which, for the hour, at least, was talked about at head quarters, in every capital of Europe.

The letters of congratulation which Lord St. Margarets received upon the occasion, would probably have papered a study, and brought him more pride and pleasure than he had ever known to arrive through the post. His son's path to the very highest destinies of his profession seemed fairly cut out. A dazzling and triumphant career, with an ultimate earldom of his own winning—this would indeed be to add lustre to an already illustrious house! And the old peer, who was an inveterate day dreamer, made up his mind that, for some years to come, it was plainly expedient that his son should not marry at all. He was still very young, and for the present, at all events,

would be far better occupied with his regiment—then on foreign service. The happy combination of chances in his favour, were such as did not occur to one in ten thousand, and it would be inexcusable not to make the most of them.

It was an odd conclusion, certainly, all things considered. One would have thought that he might have been shy of exposing his coronet a second time to the chance of being sent down a collateral line, by some wretched ounce of lead; and one might naturally have supposed that Ferdinand must be wanted at home. But Lord St. Margarets was an odd man, and didn't see things always in a regular light. His real home was in his London club, among a clique of gossiping old cronies, who babbled of Tallyrand and Waterloo. Of course, in this society, his son's late exploit had created

a prodigious sensation, and Lord St. Margarets found the excitement agreeable. At any rate, having made the above reflections, he remarked to himself that his mind was quite clear upon the subject.

Its crystallisation, however, was destined to be abruptly disturbed. A few days after the hunt-breakfast at Riverwood, Captain Hunsdon surprised rather than delighted his papa by the announcement that he had found him a daughter-in-law; in other words, that he had seen the girl whom, of all others, he would like to make his wife, provided his father saw no objection.

Lord St. Margarets prided himself upon his *savoir faire*. He had been ambassador at the court of one of the great powers, and knew how to handle matters. He wouldn't even allow himself to be ruffled by the intelligence. It simply demanded an exercise

of tact. Nothing could have been more frank and honourable than the way in which his son had spoken his mind in the very first instance. Knowing that Helen was no match for him, according to his father's views, he had come, as was right for a 'permit' to fall in love. The only question was—how to act? As to that, his mind was quite clear.

In the first place, to run the risk of estranging his son, was out of the question. Rather than that, he would have seen him turned off with the 'Ratcatcher's Daughter' herself. They must be friends always, whatever happened. In the second place, he knew that suddenly to thwart a lad in an affair of this description, was absurd in the light of all experience, and would be simply to send the last chance overboard. Finally, his diplomatic education had taught

him, that if you wish to divert anybody from a darling project, you must never allow your objections to appear in the first instance, when they are certain to be considered as mere prejudice, and treated very shortly.

However, instead of pursuing this inductive process further, let us invite ourselves for a few minutes to the pleasant dining-room at Saintswood, with father and son beside us, in snug after-dinner *tête-a-tête*.

Lord St. Margarets had, according to promise, given the matter every consideration, before finally clearing his mind, and committing himself upon a point of so much importance.

“Fill your glass, my boy, and give the fire a stir,” he exclaimed, with easy gaiety. “Well, Ferdinand, are we to drink Miss Fleetlands’ good health, and may she soon be lawful prize of war—hey?”

“You have not yet given me your opinion, sir,” replied the Captain, laughing. “I took the liberty of giving you mine pretty freely the other morning.”

“You did; and I was most pleased at your doing so. You see, Ferdinand, that if it had been one of the Strawberryleaf girls, or anybody from Hainault Towers, for instance, I should have been ready for an agreeable surprise. But as Miss Fleetlands is, as yet, a stranger, I am glad that you gave me your confidence in the first instance. As yet, I suppose, you are only feeling your way?”

“Just so, sir. Salterton introduced me to her, at old Mortlake’s breakfast, last week. It was love made easy upon my part, I can assure you. I was lucky enough to sit next her at breakfast, and I’ve seen her twice since, and hope to find her to-morrow

morning at cover-side. We meet at Bunny-tail End."

"Well done, you," remarked his father, unable to repress a smile at this liberal instalment of candour. "Try how you like her, by all means, Ferdinand. I only wish you to please yourself. Only don't get out of your depth before you know where you are. There are people about that young lady who will bring you to book if you do. I'm quite clear about that."

"That trying how you like young ladies, is awkward work," observed the Captain musingly: "You see, directly you begin, they're down upon you with just the same game. 'No trial allowed,' is nearer the mark."

"Much nearer. But I leave you to manage all that for yourself. It's a pity she should be in troublesome hands. She has money, they say."

“A great deal, I’m told, sir. Fortunately my conscience is quite clear upon that head. I really knew nothing about her being an heiress until long after I was in for it. However, that, I hope is no objection. One can put up with a little money.”

“Do you know, Ferdinand,” replied his father quietly, straightening his legs against the fender, and holding up his glass to the fire-light as he spoke, “this money would be about my greatest objection, supposing I were inclined to make any, as I certainly am not. The idea of your marrying any girl for money, is of course absurd. Nevertheless, people will talk. Somebody is always ready to explain everything. This money annoys me, and I will tell you why: Miss Fleetlands—of whom everyone speaks well—is, as I dare say you know, the daughter of an Indian officer, who was the son of

a Glamorganshire parson. Of course, since you spoke to me, I have made it my business to ascertain her antecedents."

"Well, sir?" inquired his son, not altogether satisfied with the last word.

"Well; her father was an officer in the Company's service—nothing more: and the fortune of which we are speaking fell to him quite suddenly, under the will of an old relation—Nettleton, I think he was called, who was, I am told, a monger of some sort."

"A what, sir?"

"A monger," repeated Lord St. Margarets, as if employing the word for the first time, and undecided as to its proper pronunciation.

"Not a costermonger, I hope?"

"No. But I am not sure as to the exact prefix. Stay. I believe it was a wharf-

monger. O, no. Wharfinger—that was it! At all events he managed to hoard up a great deal of money, which I would not have pass into our family upon any consideration. It would be a mistake, Ferdinand, and a serious one. I would rather lay it out in founding a house for decayed people of that sort—or get rid of it in any way—and even then we should be laughed at for our trouble. But let that pass. Miss Fleetlands I hear is fresh from a boarding-school at Brighton, where she has spent the last seven years. All very charming. I only wish I were her age. Of course we don't send our own daughters to boarding-schools; but, as to that matter, she was probably better there than living with that cracked old Admiral, and his muffin of a wife. I really have now told you all that has passed my mind upon the subject. I

don't pretend to see exactly the person I should have chosen for you, Ferdinand ; but you are to choose, not I. You ask my advice. I advise you to please yourself. With your prospects here, and the position which you have won with your own hand, I don't believe you stand second to any man in the kingdom in the way of a splendid marriage. You might probably wait at least a year or two with advantage. You are not tired of your profession yet, I suppose, with a staff appointment waiting for you. But, as I said before, please yourself. Isn't that quite clear ?”

“ I should like to ask one question. You spoke just now of Helen's being in troublesome hands. Of course I know that old Mortlake has locked himself up a good deal, and behaved altogether in an odd way. Is that all ? I declare I took rather a liking

to the old fellow the other morning. I could have fancied myself talking to Admiral Benbow !”

“I am glad that you have asked the question. When I said that this young lady was in troublesome hands, I meant, of course, as his ward. He is her guardian in Chancery. I call him troublesome for this reason. Some years ago—before he locked himself up, as you say—he got into a shocking mess when the St. Mark’s Bank stopped payment—in fact he lost the best part of his property. He had to sell a good deal of land ; and I happened to know that a few hundred acres in our direction were actually in the market. I wanted them, to square our map on the north-west, and wrote to him about them. I declare I had no idea that I was doing him otherwise than a friendly turn ; in fact, I offered to take his

title without enquiry, and named a round sum for the land. However, he chose to fancy that I was riding the high horse, and about to amuse myself by buying him up, and referred me at once to his solicitor. Since then, we have scarcely spoken. Therefore, in the present case, I must not be expected to open the ball. I am rather sorry that I did not know you were going to his breakfast the other day; or I should have mentioned all this. That, however, is of little consequence. Only recollect, that no correspondence, between myself and the Admiral, should such ever become necessary, can begin from this house. I will answer any communication, the other way, most willingly. It is more than likely that in your case he may find himself inclined to show temper. Now, only one word more, my boy. A few weeks ago you caused the

whole land to ring with your name, by making up your mind in a moment, when the lives of hundreds depended upon your decision—in fact upon the next words which fell from your lips. That was well done:—that was glorious! But depend upon it, Ferdinand, that whenever you hear a man boast that his rule is, never to hesitate, but to decide instantly in important affairs, that man is either a charlatan or an imbecile. Fellows of this kind are either simply reckless, or too nervous for the regular game of life. They would rather toss up for the stakes and have done with it, than play the rubber fairly out. Take your time and mind your moves whilst you can; and never trust to luck what you may make by play. Now, ring the bell, and let us have coffee.”

The test of diplomacy is success. Young

Hunsdon went to his room that night in a restless and undecided state of mind. If his father had spoken of his lady-love with open scorn, or pronounced himself decidedly against the match, he would at least have had the consolation of feeling himself unfortunate, if not ill-used. But he had no such solace. Not one single word indicative of the slightest disrespect for Helen herself had Lord St. Margarets let fall. All that he had said was true enough, and infinitely less than most fathers would have said, in a case in which such interests were at stake, and the descent of a noble and ancient house immediately involved.

What more could a fellow, in his position, ask than to be told to please himself? What more do any of us desire? And yet, after all, isn't it generally the most aggravating permission which it is in the

nature of words to convey? When your groom or gardener retires from argument with a stolid shrug and misbelieving eye, and remarks, "Well, sir; of course you will please yourself!" how do you feel towards the rascal? Of course we want to please ourselves, and intend to manage it if we can. No need to tell us that! But we want to be helped to do so in our own way; and not dismissed to the endeavour with a suppression which is an abuse of language.

Again and again, Ferdinand thought over the whole conversation. The more he did so, the more was he impressed with the conviction that his father had been most kind and self-denying in the business. That an union between himself and Helen would be a disappointment, he felt keenly enough, and infinitely the more so from the light easy way in which certain topics had been

touched upon. He admitted to himself that marriage at his age might be a bad beginning, if his father's ambitious views for him as a soldier were to be at all regarded. He perceived also, what had naturally never occurred to him before, that, in point of worldly position, Helen was a mere nobody in Lord St. Margarets' eyes; and that her money was, in his own case, by no means a desirable part of her belongings. The idea of his proposal being made the subject of an unworthy squabble upon the Admiral's part was highly annoying—and the expression 'brought to book' rested unpleasantly in his mind. Upon each and all of these topics his father might easily have enlarged; and he could not help feeling the delicacy and good nature with which they had been allowed to pass, as mere hints for his consideration.

Then he set himself to work deliberately to consider all that had taken place between himself and Helen. He had, after all, only seen her thrice, and he had to confess that even her attractive presence and engaging ways would perhaps hardly have produced the effect they did, but for the flattery of their first interview. The curiosity and admiration with which the young girl had regarded him, as the living wearer of a Victoria Cross, had been more than repaid upon his part. His passion for her had begun with vanity. Was it, after all, real or not? He had not yet committed himself. Did he know himself? Another meeting might render these questions superfluous.

Lord St. Margarets had known his son's mind thoroughly. Ferdinand Hunsdon had his own good, and even great gifts, from

nature; but they were of a kind which are conspicuous rather in the field and the drawing-room, than in the chamber of meditation or debate. To the most perfect amount of nerve and physical courage consistent with penetrable flesh and blood, he added a singular degree of out-of-doors judgment. This last is rather a rare, and, to those who have it not, a very inscrutable instinct. Its characteristics almost defy description, and fortunately, scarcely require it.

There are two very different sorts of people in this world. I am not thinking of the good and the wicked—among one of which classes everybody is supposed to sit—but of two prominent sets; people who always know *how* a thing is to be done, and people who always know (or rather, want to know) *why* it is to be done. Ferdinand

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Hunsdon was one of the former. When he troubled himself about whys and becauses, he was out of his depth directly. He had no turn for argument, and gave way under the feeblest pressure of 'pro' and 'con.' Action was his forte. Action whether in the football-field at Eton, in the happy hunting-ground around Riverwood, or in a sterner arena where life and death are laid in balance, and every faculty of mind and body strung to quivering tension amid the 'dreadful revelry' of battle. It was then that he knew how to trust himself. And, young as he was, he was wonderfully trusted by others. The men of his company thoroughly believed in him. Not one of them but looked upon young Hunsdon as an inspired soldier—a chief to be followed through thick and thin—an officer for whom it would be worth while to sacrifice one's light of

day. There wasn't his equal in the regiment, from the colonel down to the small boy in the band—such was the creed of rank and file; and I don't know that they were much out in their estimate.

And yet, with all this, nobody could be more easily led, by those whom he was accustomed to regard with affection and esteem. Nobody was more ready to take advice, in cool blood, upon points as to which he felt that others were better qualified to judge than himself. In short, he had all the weaknesses of a trusting and sensitive nature, and, accordingly, not only took his papa's diplomacy greatly to heart, but tormented himself through a night of sleeplessness, by wondering what the deuce he had better do about Helen.

At last it occurred to him, that obviously the best plan would be to call upon Mr.

Salterton the next day, after hunting, and ask his advice. He had known Helen from her infancy; and was, besides, a man whose opinion was really worth having. And this seemed such a good resolution, that he slept upon it for a whole hour before it was time to rise.

There was, in Lord St. Margarets' dining-room, a picture, upon which he had once set the greatest value, and held the pride and gem of his whole collection. He had purchased it, many years ago, at Florence, and a cheque of four figures had paid the price, a reflection which, so far from being disagreeable, only added to his enjoyment as its possessor. 'Diana Venatrix,' was the subject; and certainly, if buxom beauty, in its lustiest and least embarrassed form, gorgeous colouring, and wondrous power of animal painting, could justify implicit belief,

the gilded scroll beneath, which bore the name of 'P. P. RUBENS,' was rightly worn by that magnificent canvas.

Day after day, Lord St. Margarets was never tired of feasting his eyes upon its breadth of splendour, and congratulating himself upon the possession of a work which might even bear his own name down to posterity. It was already known, in the leading hand-books of art, as "The Saintswood Rubens," and report said that the town council of Antwerp had sent a special envoy to this country, for the purpose of ascertaining whether it was to be reclaimed for money.

One day, a foreigner called, as many foreigners did, for permission to view the Rubens. Lord St. Margarets chanced to be at home, and good-naturedly received the visitor himself. Nothing flattered him more

than these little pilgrimages ; while, to stand beside the shrine, and enjoy an occasional whiff of incense in person, was doubly pleasant.

The foreigner in question chanced to be a dried elderly man, of particularly small stature, with high shoulders and wide spectacles, who looked as if he had been littered in a dust-bin, and brought up upon rusks and snuff. His card bore the name of ' Ant Krinkel,' and he received Lord St. Margarets' attentions with a business-like air, observing that he was pressed for time, and alluding to an appointment at Amsterdam.

This might easily have been excused ; but, not so the way in which he inspected ' the Rubens.' Instead of looking at it from the best light in the room, to which he was courteously invited, or looking at it from under his hand, or through a roll of paper,

or, in fact, as it seemed, to any useful purpose whatever, this abominable little cinder of humanity began to peer into corners of the drapery, and ferret about the frame, in a manner which appeared to Lord St. Margarets scarcely less than impious.

“Confound the fellow, does he think there’s a rat behind the arras!” he growled to himself. “Come here, sir! Did you never see a picture before? Come and look at one now!”

“I have looked at a great many pictures, milord,” replied Ant Krinkel, hitching himself together, and re-adjusting his spectacles in a complicated fashion. “And I have looked at a great many pictures by Rubens, milord—a great many indeed. *But this is not one.* Excuse me. But I am right.”

“What the devil do you mean, sir! and who are *you*? Go to Amsterdam, and——”

I declare I mustn't finish the sentence ; Lord St. Margarets was so outrageously angry.

“ One moment, milord !” implored the intruder, with the air of a man who had been kicked aforetime, and deprecated the practice. “ One moment. Will you listen to me ? Yah ?”

Lord St. Margarets did listen ; and this was what he heard.

Unrolling as he spoke a dirty paper, and twisting his spectacles more ominously than ever, the fawning Low Countryman reminded him of every circumstance connected with the purchase of his picture. He gave him names and dates ; and even went to the unnecessary length of producing for his edification a copy of the draft on Coutts, to which the money had been paid. With equal circumstantiality, he detailed the exact story of the work, and of the sublime and

patient ingenuity by which it had been worked into the market as an accredited original of the great Master.

All this, he explained, was practically known to no man in Europe but himself. Milord had been imposed upon, no doubt. But by men who were dupes themselves. The greatest critics had been deceived, and were at that moment without suspicion. He ventured to place with his Lordship a paper embodying every word which he had just uttered. He had no concealments. He requested none. Would his Lordship condescend to enquire into the matter. Would he further, at his high leisure, command that the picture should be reversed, and observe the monogram at the left hand lower corner. A facsimile would be found in the paper which he had the honour to present.

And was that all ?

Not quite ; as you may suppose. In a slimy shuffling manner, which drove Lord St. Margarets to the verge of criticide, the rogue explained that he was at the moment engaged upon a great work—‘The Painters of the Low Countries.’ He had the patronage of many crowned heads—of the principal Universities in Europe. Lord St. Margarets’ Rubens was a work of mark. To pass it over without notice was impossible. His Lordship could judge, from proofs now in his own possession, as to the speaker’s qualifications as a critic. Should he call again ? In a month ? In six weeks ? Time was of no consequence. His work was for all time. As regarded *that* picture, he concluded with a frightful shrug, he was at his Lordship’s service.

I have no occasion to pursue the subject.

I don't know what happened next. That Lord St. Margarets had been the victim of a masterly swindle, which had entrapped people much better able to judge of pictures than himself, is certain. I only know that, ever after this interview, he hated the very name of Rubens, and would gladly have consigned the Saintswood specimen to the billiard-room, or the back-stairs. But to have confessed the extent of his victimisation was more than his diplomatic philosophy could abide. The secret, however secured, remained his own, and the chaste goddess was allowed still to smile from his dining-room wall, silently preaching to his Lordship an useful lesson upon the mysterious unrealities of life. The picture had not changed. The sky still shone—the wind blew, the floating canopy of cloud sailed on ; the hounds bayed and bounded around their

mistress, and the gallant Flemish steed, with foaming curb, snuffed lovingly among her flying tresses. But a loathsome little Dutchman had crawled in like a toad, and fire and wind and radiant air and the music of exultant life had departed at his whisper, and given place to naked vulgarity and tawdry glare.

Lord St. Margarets paused that evening before the picture, on his way to bed, and surveyed it steadily by the light of his flat candlestick. He was very deep in thought; and, as he looked, a dry compressed smile passed slowly over his lips. It was the smile of a statesman who had made a *coup*; of a man whose mind is, quite clear upon one point. But I am not in the confidence of ex-ambassadors, and have only my own private guess as to the nature of his meditations.

So I shall follow the example of the Editor

of the 'Daily Courant,' the first daily paper ever published in England, who in his opening number announced that he should not be at the pains to write leaders upon his news—"supposing other people to have wit enough to make reflections for themselves."

I have read a few essays, and heard a few speeches, and undergone a good many sermons in my time, wishing earnestly that the expounders had been of the same mind as honest "Edward Mallet, over against the Ditch at Fleet Bridge," Anno Domini 1702.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a splendid winter morning. A pearly vaporous haze was drifting over lake and lawn and clustering woods, as the sun went slowly up into an unclouded sky. Scarcely a breath of air was stirring, yet there was a living freshness in the atmosphere which felt like a promise of the far-off spring.

Ferdinand's dressing-room was at the top of a large and lofty pile of building, known as the East Tower. Its quaint octagonal shape, deeply recessed windows, and vaulted ceiling, were picturesque; but the great glory of the room was its look-out. It was

a thoroughly English landscape such as you never find abroad, and not very often, it must be confessed, at home. People who ought to know, pronounced it one of the most perfect in the kingdom.

It would be difficult to imagine a more commanding eminence, with forest, park, and water stretching far into the lower distance, down to where, miles away, appeared the smoke of a small sea-town. Beyond, and high over all, piled as it were against the horizon, stood the broad, unbroken circle of ocean-rim.

The perfect stillness was only broken by an occasional measured boom from the sea. An iron-clad was trying her new guns at a target laid out in the offing, and each sullen reverberation came shuddering through the morning air as if marking another interval of time.

One hates to be reminded of its passage

when one has a nervous business coming on; and Ferdinand, to tell the truth, felt desperately nervous that morning. It could scarcely have been otherwise. His heart misgave him that under the influence of his first fascination he had permitted himself to show more of the state of his own feelings than was either prudent, or generous by Helen. Now, he had to see her in a new light, and look at her, for one morning at least, with his father's eyes. He could not dare to trust himself as he had done before. Perhaps she was, at that moment, looking forward with pleasure to seeing him in the field. He knew she liked to meet him—indeed she had never been at any pains to conceal the fact. And now he had to atone for his own previous indiscretion by a behaviour which could scarcely fail to occasion her both vexation and surprise. However,

there was no help for it, and he proceeded uncomfortably with his toilet.

Ferdinand, as we know, took a good deal of thought about his raiment, and was indescribably careful of his personal appearance. To some men this is natural, and they would like to go smart, even if their days were to be as those of Robinson Crusoe, before he caught Friday to look at him. With others it is a pure matter of vanity; and some people are tidy on principle. I am thinking of an anecdote which a brother officer of his happened to tell me only a few nights ago. He had been observing that Hunsdon used to come in for no small amount of chaff upon the score of his dandy habits whilst on service, and more especially for the exceeding care with which he always attended to every nicety of dress and person in the immediate prospect of action.

One day, on the morning of an assault, my friend chanced to overhear a couple of privates exchanging their own comments upon Ferdinand's appearance.

"William," said one, "see little Hunsdon walk down the ranks just now, with new gloves and a pockethandketcher, and his hair curled for fightin'? Blessed if there's such another little game-cock in the whole brigade!"

"Not of my knowledge," replied William. "Where man or officer can go, he'll go—and stand who won't, he will."

"Aye, that's what's at the bottom of it, no doubt," returned the other. "But, mind you, William, that to see that little chap looking just as if he was fresh out of England at a go in like this, is as good as ten files to the strength of the company."

This conclusion, William did not gainsay,

and my friend seemed to think that there might have been something in the remark. But, whilst I have been digressing, Ferdinand has been dressing; and his horse is already pawing the gravel in front of the coffee-room window.

This coffee-room was quite an institution at Saintswood. It was a very modest apartment upon the ground floor, with a great oaken table in the middle, which had a mission of its own.

Every morning, during the winter months, breakfast was laid upon that table, for the benefit as well of any guests staying in the house who might choose to patronise it, as of the many people in the neighbourhood who had the privilege of *entrée*. It was a convenient arrangement. There was no fuss, no waiting, no ceremony, and you might light your cigar in the room. There

was one particular bell labelled 'Breakfast,' a single pull at which, at any hour of the morning, was answered by the apparition of coffee and toast for one, with something appropriate in the way of *hors d'œuvres chaudes*. You took your chance of what came up, like children round a bran-tub. Every man for himself, and wait for nobody, was the greedy rule of the room.

There were only three men at breakfast when Ferdinand entered, by whom he was of course received with acclamation, and a chorus of enquiries as to the state of his wounded arm.

"All right, thank you. Hard as ever, I hope in another week's time! All breakfasting, I see. That's right. Getting late, isn't it? Half-past nine, I declare, by the clock!"

"You've just come in time for a bet,

Hunsdon," exclaimed Mr. Scatterley, a loud boisterous youth fresh from Oxford. "Andrew has just offered to lay Kingston and me a pound apiece, even, that he rides off with Miss Fleetlands, of Riverwood, within a fortnight. He'll give you a chance too, I'll be bound."

"Ha, ha! Now, that's too bad," laughed Captain Andrew. "What I said was, I'd bet a pound anybody might do it, and I was just considering, ha, ha, whether I would go in for her myself or not;—that's what I said."

Captain Andrew, who claimed military rank as an ornament of the county yeomanry, was also a very young man, with weak eyes, and a weak laugh, and the face of a debauched doll. He was reported to be the richest man, next to Lord St. Margarets, for a great many miles round.

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“Would you mind touching the bell behind you, Kingston?” said Ferdinand, horrified at the conversation which he perceived had been going on.

Few young ladies, I suppose, are sanguine enough to imagine that the gentlemen of their acquaintance always talk of them, among themselves, with exactly the same agreeable empressement which they display in their presence. Many a pair of innocent eyes, however, would open considerably, could the owners only overhear their own points, action, temper, and market-value candidly discussed in free-and-easy conclave around a smoking-room fire. I am not sure but that many a young lady might be allowed to listen with considerable advantage. And yet I don't know. Without a certain amount of illusion, reservation, and conventional insincerity, life would become

insupportable. The little girl who spoilt her scissors in opening Matilda Jane, to find her filled with sawdust, fell a victim to indiscreet curiosity, and left a warning to her elder sisters. But, if punishment were in question, and I were at liberty to devise the sorest I could think of for a damsel who had affronted me, I should assuredly condemn her to hear herself talked about for half an hour by a fool in high spirits.

"Well, but, I say, Hunsdon," continued Captain Andrew, still gobbling away as he spoke, "what's your opinion of this new star of the hunt? What do you say to her, now, as a fine animal, sir, hey?"

"I have not as yet formed any opinion whatever," returned Ferdinand, dryly. "I say, Kingston, what are we to do about that row with old Rogers? Are we to pay, or not?"

“By Jove! you’ve had the best chance of any of us,” interposed Scatterley. “I envied you, I’m sure, the other day, at the Riverwood hang out. As if you weren’t next her all the time, and all the fellows said she couldn’t keep her eyes off you; and was seen cracking away ever so long at her coffee-cup instead of an egg—through being what the ladies call *preoccupée*.”

“Nonsense! However, since I was so fortunate as to find myself next her, I’m glad to hear I was supposed to make myself pleasant.”

“It strikes me as a deuced odd thing—I don’t know how you see it—Hunsdon,” observed Sir Edward Kingston, “that old Mortlake should allow this young lady, who I understand to be his ward, to ride, as she does, with no better escort than her groom. I’m told she’s entitled to a whole heap of

money under some strange will or other, and loses it all if she marries under twenty-three. Did you ever hear the real story?"

"As to riding," interrupted Scatterley, before Ferdinand could reply, "I don't know a girl in the county better able to take care of herself with hounds. She's not likely to ask you to show her the way, nor to want anybody's help either. I'd give something, if she'd show me how to ride my horse as she does hers. And, by Jove, sir, talk about escort, just you notice that fellow, Gigoggin, always at her heels. He's got his orders to range within half a stable's length of her all day; and, if anybody hails, to lay alongside, with his bow on the engaged quarter—bring his starboard daddle to the peak, like a marine, and hold on till they cease firing. Those are the Admiral's orders, sir, and, by Jove, you may see them

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carried out to the letter, any day of the week. No tricks with Gigoggin, I can tell you, or you'll find him as great a cherub as his master!"

"Pawn my soul, that's true, now," remarked Captain Andrew. "The beggar has the most diabolical countenance. He almost rode into me last Friday, when I ventured to wave my hand and cry 'bravo!' to his lady, as she came after me over a rail. I begin to think that I shall have to whip him, before very long, do you know, in the natural course of events."

"I recommend you to do so, most decidedly," remarked Sir Edward, gravely. "You won't be too rough with the young man, I dare say? Very likely he thinks he is only doing his duty."

"Ha, ha! No—I'll pity him a little for his mistress' sake. I'll bet the story about

the money is all moonshine. I can see plain enough how the land lies. The old Admiral is trotting her out, horse and all. Riding them to sell; that's my opinion. Only wish he'd let me take them both upon trial, for a month or six weeks!"

"I tell you what, Andrew," observed Ferdinand, in a careless tone, which nevertheless had something not quite natural about it, "I strongly advise you, when you get home, to ask your mamma to rummage out the family birch! By Jove, you'd be the better for it."

"Ha, ha, capital! No more birch rods for me, brother-soldier!" sniggled the miserable youth. "Nimrod, ramrod, and fishing-rod, are my rods now."

"O come, Andrew, we've heard that before! Shut up and show us your new nag. Hunsdon, we'll wait for you at the west

lodge. Come along you little rake, or, by jingo, I'll tell Miss Fleetlands that you're given to gluttony."

"That fellow ought to have been drowned young," muttered Ferdinand, as the pair quitted the room. "Pity his friends ever let him grow up. What do you say, Kingston?"

"Ah, it was one of those mistakes parents make. Lucky for him, as you say, that they didn't weed the kennel. I don't know whether you are at all acquainted with the young lady, but I saw you look annoyed."

"I only wish I were sufficiently acquainted, to give master Andrew something else to chatter about. He shan't breakfast here again, if I know it. Try one of these cigars. They have a history. It is about time to be off."

Nothing, to my mind, is more unsatis-

factory than to have to do anything I don't like. But to be watched in doing it is to undergo the difficulty and annoyance doubled. Under certain circumstances the intrusion becomes insupportable, and although heroes are popularly supposed to be less susceptible of the pudor in oculis, than other people, I suspect we are all pretty much alike in that particular.

It was not till towards the middle of the day that Ferdinand chanced to encounter Helen. There had been a brisk run, and a fox killed, and people had pulled up, and were walking their horses about in groups, talking of what was to happen next.

The first glance warned him that, if he was to look at her with his father's eyes, he ought to have brought his papa's tinted spectacles in his pocket. Nothing so lovely as she looked at that moment, flushed and

happy with excitement, and scarcely able to rein the impatient Camilla, quivering for another gallop, had ever crossed his imagination. He thought he had known her face well enough—and yet, for an instant, it seemed as if he had scarcely grasped it at all. A confused suspicion, moreover, that, if all secrets were told, he had himself something to do with that radiant overflow of beauty—that the pleasure of that particular minute was told in those coloured cheeks and sparkling eyes, made the meeting still more embarrassing. Not to dwell upon the fact that he felt that many were watching, and that in all probability the dirty green peepers of the scandalous little Andrew might be blinking maliciously in his direction.

It was very unlike Ferdinand to lose his presence of mind, or fail, either in deed or

word, to do justice to himself in any emergency. Unluckily upon this particular occasion he contrived to blunder and break down altogether. He was confused and spoke awkwardly ; and, worse still, made a miserable mess of a matter of common politeness. He didn't perceive, as he raised his cap to Helen, that she not only expected him to shake hands, but had passed her whip into her bridle-hand for that purpose. And, when he did perceive it, the young lady had withdrawn her offer, looking a little disconcerted. It was a trifle—but trifles of this sort drive a sensitive man to the verge of distraction. They are recollected, long after they happen, with a stinging bitterness of self-accusation which ought to be reserved for nothing less than one of the seven sins. In short, after having contrived, in the course of a couple of minutes, to impress

Helen with the conviction that some extraordinary change had come over him, and that, for some inscrutable reason, he intended to drop her acquaintance, he fairly turned his horse and rode off the field, desperate with vexation and self-disgust.

Luckily Mr. Salterton's rectory was within a mile, so he rode there for luncheon. He determined to lay his whole mind, so far as he knew it, open to the Rector, with his father's views into the bargain, and to be guided by his advice. It was a wise resolution, for there was no man in the county better capable of advising him.

I am certain that every young lady who may do me the honour to peruse these pages, is confidently trusting that Captain Andrew may not be forgotten altogether, or dismissed without some appropriate casualty. Fortunately I have one to record.

Gigoggin was not to be trifled with. He was a man of wrath, and easily roused to vengeance. He looked upon Helen very much as his own child, and was careful as to her acquaintances. To tell the truth, I believe he had already awarded her in marriage to Captain Hunsdon, who was his *beau ideal* of what a gentleman ought to be. Captain Andrew he could not abide. And when that young simpleton came cantering and capering in front of his mistress, foolishly trying to attract her notice with puppy smiles and impertinent 'brayvos,' the cauldron of Gigoggin's indignation boiled hotter and higher, till it boiled over at last, to some purpose.

That groom of iron saw his chance and seized it. The hounds were running, the field was riding, when the audacious yeomanry officer, in trying to display his horse-

manship and adoration at the same time, blundered stupidly under the nose of Camilla. In an instant Gigoggin was upon him, not upon Happy-go-lucky, for, when Helen had been allowed to enter the hunting-field, her esquire had been provided with a mount to match the man. Over he went—fifteen or sixteen times, according to his own subsequent calculation—amid a perfect kaleidoscope of squibs and horse-shoes, which only settled into intelligible pattern when he found himself spread-eagled in a furrow, like a turned turtle, and ridden over by everybody who had a horse.

It was a serious lesson ; for so strongly was he impressed with the conviction that the shock had ‘done harm to his wits,’ that I believe to this day he seldom speaks three words consecutively without whimpering. I wonder if Gigoggin will ever come to be

tried for manslaughter. It will go hard with him, I am afraid, unless he has a very honest judge, and a jury composed chiefly of dragoons.

But it is time to think a little more of Helen herself, to whom I am not quite sure that I have as yet done author's justice.

It may seem a bold assertion to make, but I believe it to be true nevertheless, that Helen had passed through the ordeal of seven years noviciate at a fashionable boarding-school without sensible damage to her character. There are some minds whose native purity and freshness seem to preserve them against the mischief of unwholesome contact, just as gold is able to retain its lustre in an atmosphere which would be tarnish and destruction to baser metal. Whatever she may have heard or learned in the play-ground, she was still, at heart,

thoroughly young, simple and unspoilt. The wildness and self-will of her childhood had moulded themselves into a quiet, resolute, and independent spirit—a little enthusiastic perhaps, but still, for every day purposes under the control of no small amount of judgment and good sense. Even her own singular position and prospects, which would have turned the heads of most girls, were in her case disarmed of half their danger. She thought about them, certainly; and was pleased, so far as she could realise their meaning. But, except in the unfortunate instance, when a painful, and perhaps inevitable, suspicion had been forced upon a mind which was frankness and sincerity itself, she had scarcely wasted one serious reflection upon the subject. She had not yet learned to ‘give thought to the morrow,’ and ‘the evil of the day’ was yet to come.

The change was near at hand. Feelings that had never yet been awakened, were now to bloom and break, and dart their living tendrils through and through her nature, and overshadow her very being with a sudden canopy of tropic growth.

That she should have been quite insensible to Captain Hunsdon's marked attentions, was impossible ; but it is not less true that she had hitherto never ventured to accept them as her own. Her first impressions of Ferdinand had been those of wonder and admiration. She regarded him as a bright young hero, whom to see and converse with, was pleasure enough in itself. She noticed the way in which he was flattered and courted by everybody in the hunting-field, and innocently wondered that he should ever find time for a word with her, or even remember her name. And

when the conviction grew stronger and stronger, that he not only found time to talk to her, but talked to her more and more eagerly than to anybody else ; and when she remembered that, whenever he appeared, Gigoggin always broke a stirrup-leather, or cast a shoe, or met with some other calamity, and went off to a gate, or got behind a tree to examine damages—a sort of dreamlike illusion seemed to be settling over everything.

And perhaps as a dream it might have continued for some time longer, but for the sudden awakening brought about upon the morning of which we have just been speaking.

Ferdinand's behaviour had been to Helen a perfect mystery. Her first impression naturally was that she must unconsciously have said or done something to annoy him,

and she puzzled her head accordingly to very little purpose. People who never take offence themselves, are slow in comprehending how that unwholesome process evolves in the minds of others, and make odd mistakes when they attempt to pick out the veritable point of discord. One thing, however, she did discover in the course of her self-examination, and what that was, no young lady will be at a loss to imagine. It was her turn to look forward to the next meeting, whenever that might be, with a troubled and anxious heart.

I do not know exactly what passed between Ferdinand and the Rector. Perhaps even if I did, I should be bound to consider it confidential, seeing that the latter in giving any advice at all, must have found himself upon delicate ground. But it is certain that, at the very next meeting, ample

amends were made for the mistakes of the last, and that for many days and nights afterwards, the secret chambers of Helen's heart were warm and glorious with that 'purple light,' which, alas, for many of us—perhaps not for you, O, fortunate reader—is kindled but once in a life-time.

It may strike you as grotesque, to say the least of it, to picture the heir of Saintswood, with its baronial towers and forest miles, on the one hand, and a wealthy and beautiful heiress like Helen, on the other, exchanging amiabilities from their respective saddles, simply because they had no other place in the world to transact business in. Polly and her baker, at yonder area railing, are not more obviously at sea for a bower.

It was, however, one of the necessities of their situation, and what you may probably call upon me more seriously to explain, is

how the flirtation could possibly have been carried on, without at once coming to the ears of Admiral Mortlake.

That point became also a puzzle to the Admiral himself in due season, but then he was not as alive as he might have been to the fact that he was an unpopular character, and that it would have been difficult to find any one base enough to carry tales of Helen—especially in connection with an universal favourite like Ferdinand Hunsdon—to such an unsentimental old crocodile.

But, not to mince matters, Gigoggin was the real go-between, and scandalously betrayed his trust. He had been sworn by all that he held holy, whatever that might be, to keep strict watch and ward over his young mistress; to allow her to speak to no one, except in his immediate presence, and to report all that he had heard, seen, or

suspected, to the Admiral, in the evening, like the spy of a private inquiry office. And the old henchman was really so ugly and uncivil to people in general, that one would have fancied he would have enjoyed the task.

It so happened, however, that, like Desdemona, Gigoggin perceived before him 'a divided duty,' and whilst he conscientiously fulfilled his mission as Helen's aide-de-camp, and would have tolerated nothing which might have struck him as an impropriety, he deliberately declined to bring her to grief about matters which he considered as not only natural, but very much to her credit. So he shut his eyes to a good deal that passed in the field, and lied like a dentist whenever he was, what he called, kicked into it, in cross-examination.

Some people assert that he was bribed by

the Captain, but this is a mistake. It is true that upon one occasion, a gentleman who wished to be well with Helen, offered him a ham sandwich with a sovereign in it, but the result only proved in what perfect simplicity this expensive refreshment was accepted. For Gigoggin, after the most unearthly chuckling that ever proceeded from human glottis, suddenly exploded like a horse-pistol, and fired the unlucky coin into a farmer's garden, two fields off.

As for Helen, she fortunately had no occasion to tell one single fib in the matter. It was not her guardian's policy to make her feel herself mistrusted, and he never pressed her with questions of an awkward nature. On the other hand, he entered into her amusements with a sort of growling good humour, and began to talk about people she must visit, and dinners that he must give,

until she was reminded of her old fairy-tale reading, and of how Orson came at last, to be endowed with reason.

All this was very well, but it could not last for ever. Never count your secret safely kept, merely because you do not hear it told. The bird of the air may have carried the matter, and you none the wiser. And one day, that same spiteful fowl explained the whole story to the Admiral.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE weeks of fine, open weather, which had made everybody happy in England, who deserved to be so, broke up suddenly at last. A good honest frost with bracing breath, and shooting, skating, and the like, to employ and console the frozen-out fox-hunter, would scarcely have been unwelcome, but it was not so written in the calendar. The weather had broken in bad earnest, and for days together there was a howling north wind and skies that streamed with sleet, and roads that offered nothing to man or beast but cold abominable mire.

Luckily for all parties concerned, the guest-chambers at Saintswood chanced to be at the moment tolerably well filled. It was a famous house to be weather-bound in, for more reasons than one. In the first place, you were always certain to find there people whom you liked to meet. In the second, it was one of those grand old buildings in which there is room enough for everything and everybody. And then, there was no formality. Lord St. Margarets had seen a little of embroidery and etiquette, sticks and chamberlains, at one or two places where he had spent the greater portion of his diplomatic career, and perhaps had no objection to a rather rigid ritual when at home in Grosvenor Square. But at his country house, he liked nothing so well as to surround himself with holiday life, and to see his guests assemble, like folks at a

pic-nic, with the undissembled intention of enjoying themselves.

And, to people thus disposed, even the villainous weather which had set in, presented no insurmountable difficulty. The great dining-room was cleared for croquêt, and a famous lawn it made, upon which all the main fascinations of that pleasant game came out rather heightened than otherwise. And, at luncheon time, it was voted, that to have the tables and chairs replaced, would be grievous waste of time, and give a vast amount of useless trouble into the bargain. So it was ordered to be laid upon the carpet, and to be considered as taking place in the Forest of Arden.

I am told that the face of the reverend butler, when he entered the gallery, and announced with lofty composure—‘Luncheon is upon the—floor,’ was a study in itself.

However, the plan succeeded; and when somebody proposed to change the scene, next day, to the Gemmi Pass, and have it upon the great staircase, the suggestion was unanimously applauded, and ordered to be carried into effect. After luncheon, there was a grand *tir au pistolet* for prizes in the hall; and an important billiard match between Captain Hunsdon and Flora Richmond, one hundred up—twenty points given—for a pair of gloves.

“Now,” exclaimed that young lady, as the game grew warm, “that was something like a break, Captain Hunsdon! Two cannons and a winning hazard! You in hand, and both balls in baulk! Well done me, I declare! It is you to play. Fifteen to thirty-one is the game. The striker fifteen.”

“A cannon on the balls,” observed Ferdinand.

"No!—is there? I should like to see you make it," returned Flora, chalking her cue. "Only tell me how, first, or it shall be called a fluke."

"Right hand cushion, six inches from top corner pocket—side to the left—come down just below left middle pocket, and cannon, mademoiselle! Now, then."

Click—click.

"Well, I declare that's too bad. And look what's left! Really, Captain Hunsdon, if I had known that you were such a disreputably good player, I shouldn't have put my gloves on at those odds, I assure you!"

"Chalk away, Flo!" exclaimed her sister, as Flora, after the custom of people with a game going against them, applied dose after dose of the carbonate to her idle cue.

"Miss Richmond has the best of the game yet," said a young guardsman, who was

marking. "I say, Hunsdon, I should like to give you two to one about that last stroke, and go on as long as you like. Will you have it?"

"A letter for you, sir," interrupted a servant, entering the room. "Admiral Mortlake's groom is below, sir, with directions to take your pleasure as to his waiting for an answer."

"Put it down. Tell him I am engaged at this moment, and will let him know presently. It is you to play, Miss Richmond, I believe."

"O, please don't mind me, if you want to write an answer," cried Flora. "I can wait as long as you like, you know, so long as there's plenty of chalk. Won't you read it?"

'It does seem so shocking
To keep people knocking,'

as somebody says."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, Ferdinand, for asking questions about a letter," exclaimed a young cousin, peering inquisitively at the envelope, "but, really, I have such a great curiosity about Admiral Mortlake—I mean Admiral Mortlake of Riverwood—that you won't mind my looking at the outside, will you?"

"Look as long as you like, my dear Constance; you would be perfectly welcome to open and read it, only that, I suppose, would be scarcely fair by the Admiral, since he has chosen to favour me with his correspondence."

"Fair! No, of course it wouldn't. Only fancy my writing you a letter, and your letting Flora read it first, for instance! Catch me writing to you again!" laughed Lady Constance. "But, Ferdinand, do tell me; is it true that he really keeps that beautiful

Miss Fleetlands locked up in a strong room, and fed upon sugar-plums; and only lets her out on hunting mornings with a keeper disguised as a groom?—and what's that dreadful story about her papa's being buried, and the will, and all the money?"

"O," exclaimed Janet Richmond, "is that the man? Do you know we're dying to hear all about it. Everybody talks of her, you know, and somebody is always sure of something; but the worst of it is that nobody is ever able to understand more than anybody else; and there are no more bodies in the world than that, are there? Perhaps he tells you in his letter?"

"If he does, I'll let you know," replied Ferdinand, smiling. "But I should almost doubt his pitching upon me, as a proper person to know the facts, and suddenly sending full particulars. I had heard of her

papa's having been buried ; but it struck me as the regular thing."

"I'm just as curious as my sister," began Flora, but a famous cannon presented itself, and the well-chalked cue was brought into requisition.

"Game !" called the marker, at last. "Miss Richmond, one hundred ; Captain Hunsdon, ninety-six."

"Fairly beaten," confessed the latter. "Miss Richmond, I owe you a pair of gloves. You must let me measure you for them very carefully this evening, or there will certainly be some mistake. And, now that you have defeated the line, I advise you to demolish the Guards, whilst your hand is in. Come, Heston ! let Miss Richmond polish you off, whilst I send this unlucky groom away with his answer."

Coolly as Ferdinand had passed off the

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matter, it is not to be supposed that he retired to read his letter in either a tranquil or comfortable state of mind. Like Bob Acre's memorable epistle, which had a designing and malicious look about it, and, to honest David's apprehension, 'smelt of gunpowder like a soldier's pouch,' there was something positively formidable in the large envelope—the scrawling, yet tremendously legible address—and the great broad scarlet seal. It was, in fact, 'a despatch'—nothing less. The contents were as follows :—

“ Riverwood Lawn,

“ January 18th.

“ SIR,

“ Circumstances have occurred, which, while rendering it necessary that I should place myself at once in communication with you, seem to suggest personal explanations, rather than a written correspondence.

“I am debarred by considerations which no one can lament more than myself, from waiting upon you at your father’s house.

“I take the liberty, therefore, of requesting that you will either name some place where I may do myself that honour, or favour me with an intimation that you will visit me at Riverwood; in which event I shall await your pleasure at any hour you may think fit to appoint.

“I have, &c.,

“HERCULES MORTLAKE,

“Rear Admiral.

“The Hon. Captain Hunsdon, V.C.,

“Saintswood.”

Whatever might have been the meaning of this gracious summons, one thing was certain—that it would have to be attended to sooner or later; and, that being so, Ferdinand wisely determined to get the business

out of hand at once. There is no more miserable mistake in life, than the postponing of that which is unpleasant. It is like keeping something objectionable in your pocket, to molest and poison you the whole day long, instead of instantly getting rid of the nuisance. Therefore, having ascertained from the messenger that his master was certain to be found at home during the remainder of the evening, he dismissed him with a brief note, to the effect that Captain Hunsdon would lose no time in affording the desired interview, and might be looked for at Riverwood towards four o'clock. And he ordered his horse accordingly.

It would be difficult to imagine a more perfectly detestable afternoon. Torrents of sleet were still spattering down through the discoloured air; there was a vicious wind blowing, and the roads were as bad as a

bog. But the rider felt that, go he must. He did not like the tone of the note which he had just received ; and, knowing that it could only relate to one possible subject, felt that there was no rest for him until that business was settled.

Perhaps you may have expected that I should have said rather more than I have, about his own private feelings with regard to Helen, since the day when he broke down so unfortunately in the attempt to admire her at arm's length. Very young ladies, at least, would like to hear how his heart turned to her, and her alone, amid all the gaieties of Saintswood ; and to be supplied with copies of sonnets composed in his airy tower, and repeated to the family owls, by the comfortable light of a January moon.

Well, if I leave something unsaid, in this

part of my story, it is partly because I do not pretend to know everything, and partly because the process of falling in love is one which must be described by a very clever hand ; or else, beyond all question, let alone altogether. Neither you nor I, probably, would like to have all the thoughts, feelings, and doings of that golden morning, retailed to courteous readers ; or wouldn't walk in the middle of the street for the rest of our lives, if anyone were cunning and cruel enough to put us to such open shame.

But if I may at all guess at Ferdinand's meditations during the rough half hour which carried him to Riverwood, I suspect that they were much to this purport.

Come what might, the die was cast, and his choice made. Nobody but Helen should be the next mistress of his old halls, so far

as he was concerned. The impression of that first meeting, when he might have remarked with the Moor,—

“She loved me for the dangers I had passed ;
And I loved her that she did pity them !”

had grown and strengthened with every succeeding interview, until it had ripened into that wild hungry longing, which it is easier to remember than to describe. Could he charge himself with precipitation? Scarcely. Had he not boldly explained to his father what was likely to happen in the very first instance, and received permission to please himself? Had he not fairly talked the matter over with Mr. Salterton, and learned nothing which he could have wished otherwise? True, his acquaintance could hardly be said to be a very deep one; but what matter for that, if it had taught him all he cared to know? Nine people out of

ten know little more of their wives, when they propose, than he did of Helen. Old women tell us that 'marriages are made in Heaven;' and certainly, unless these arrangements are, in fact, the objects of a peculiar providence, there are few important affairs in this life which are managed more religiously at random. An accidental meeting—a chance conversation—a glance—a word, have done the work fifty times over in every week since the conquest, and lit the flame which was to weld two lives inseparably as one, and leave a lasting impress upon the development of the human race.

There was a touch of mystery, too, about Helen, which had an interest of its own. Everybody knew that she was under some strict control in the way of marriage, and that the destinies of a great fortune were involved in her choice. That obstacles

would be interposed, appeared quite likely, but Ferdinand was ready to wait. He had all but satisfied himself that his own feelings were returned—indeed, to tell the truth, he knew that there was no doubt about the matter; and, that being so, he was content to bide his time. The prospect of a couple of years delay would, as he well knew, make all the difference in the world to his father. Lord St. Margarets never started difficulties two years in advance. Give him but that space of time to turn about in—to bring his diplomatic spiriting to bear—and to await the flux and change of all things terrestrial, and you might make your own bargain. And by the time that two years, or so, had run out, (any change of mind upon the part of an enamoured couple being, of course, out of the question,) he would have become so far acclimatised to the project, and so much

in love with Helen himself, that she would be received with open arms.

In the meantime, whilst his papa was being thus gracefully relegated to self-delusion, Ferdinand, as he was well aware, would be remorselessly marched off to the wars, to take his chance of coming back with a cork leg or a glass eye, or, more serious still, no scull for his future coronet. All families have their traditions, and those of the St. Margarets' were feudatory and warlike.

"Adsum!" was their motto, centuries old. The heir was bound to serve. And Ferdinand had begun to think how nice it would be to receive letters from Helen, in camp, and to compose most interesting replies, for her benefit, when a vivid piece of descriptive writing was suddenly demolished, by finding his horse's nose at the gates of Riverwood.

He had only once before entered the place, and, if anything had been wanting to convince him of the true state of his feelings, he might have found it in the strange, inexplicable interest, which everything around him seemed to awaken. Nothing, though ever so common-place and trivial—whether tree, post, or gate, old woman at the lodge-entrance, or handle of the hall-door bell, but seemed hallowed by her look or touch. And she was there herself! Somewhere up in those snow-beaten eaves, perhaps. More probably in that warm-looking, lamp-lit drawing-room, whose glimmer went out upon the lawn between the shutters which a servant was, at the very instant, employed in closing. But just as far removed from him that evening, for all useful purposes, as if she had been ten thousand miles away, and down in the valley of diamonds.

However, it is in the nature of business to supplant romance, and Ferdinand found himself at once ushered into the Admiral's study.

We know the room already, with its clubs, canoes, and cocoa-nut men, its towering iron chest, and other belongings.

A great log was slowly consuming itself upon the hearth, and the lamp, just lighted, threw mysterious glimpses around the dark apartment. Admiral Mortlake rose hastily from his arm-chair, and received his visitor with even more than customary ceremony. But it was plain that some strong constraint was upon him, and that he had a matter in hand which he would have given a good deal to know how to get rid of, or to transact.

"Captain Hunsdon, I am perfectly confounded at seeing you here on such a frightful evening. Sir, I hope and trust that there was nothing in my note which could

have been so far misunderstood as to lead you to take this ride upon my account. Sir, you should have allowed me the honour of waiting upon you, rather than have driven me to apologies which I am at a loss for words to convey. Can I say more, sir—ha?”

“I beg you will say nothing more, Admiral. I was rather glad of an excuse for a ride; that was all. And, as to the weather, I’ve seen rather too much of this sort of thing to care a button about it.”

“Ha! You are young, and a soldier. At all events draw your chair to the fire, Captain Hunsdon, and let us try another log—so! If I had had the slightest idea that I should have the pleasure of a call from you this evening, I would have taken care to be better prepared—ha!”

“Captain Hunsdon,” resumed the Admiral, after a pause which threatened to become

awkward, "in making the communication which I have to make, and to which my note of this morning refers, I will be brief and straightforward. I was not aware, sir, until last evening, that your acquaintance with my ward, Miss Fleetlands, had extended—without either information or inquiry directed to myself—into a degree of intimacy which has become the subject of general conversation. I learned so much, sir, last evening. It is for you to say whether I have been misinformed."

"I don't know who your informant may be, Admiral; however, I dare say you may trust him. My hope is that the acquaintance may ripen into something considerably more satisfactory; and, as her guardian, I take the liberty of telling you so."

"But you should have told me before, sir—you should have told me before," muttered

the Admiral, rising from his chair, and displaying his broad coat-skirts to the chimney-blaze. "Captain Hunsdon, I entertain the very highest respect for you personally, both as a gallant soldier, and one of the leading men in this county. Still, sir, you will permit me to remind you, that a young lady's position in society is injured by marked and public attentions, from any one, no matter how distinguished, which may ultimately come to nothing ; and that it is the duty of those about her to preserve her, so far as possible, from expectations which can only end in disappointment and useless pain."

"Had you not better proceed, Admiral?" said Ferdinand, leaning back in his chair. "Your last remarks require a conclusion."

"Ha, sir, very true ! And the conclusion is this. It is a conclusion, sir, which would have been at your service in the first instance, had you condescended to inquire it.

Miss Fleetlands, as you may probably be aware, is heiress to a very large fortune. That fortune, sir, her father, under views with which I have no concern, chose to preserve to her own use thus far—namely, that he exerted all legal means in his power to restrain her marriage up to the age of three-and-twenty. I have a copy of his will in a safe yonder, which you will perhaps accept, to read at your leisure. Now, sir, Miss Fleetlands will, in exactly five years from Wednesday last, attain the age of three-and-twenty. Until that day, I, as her guardian, must decline to promise my assent to her marriage. You may think that my late friend, Colonel Fleetlands, was unreasonable in what he did. I do not. We grow cautious as we grow older, Captain Hunsdon; and though I may regret the course which I feel obliged to take in this par-

ticular instance, I am pledged to fulfil his last wish to the uttermost. I am sorry, as I said before, that mere casual information, volunteered by a stranger, should have led me, as it were, to obtrude this information upon you—rather than it should have been supplied at an earlier period in answer to some direct application from yourself.”

“Three-and-twenty! Is it possible that I can have understood you, Admiral?”

“It is the fact, sir. My control over my ward’s actual marriage may or may not extend beyond the age of twenty-one. But should she marry without my consent, previously to attaining that of twenty-three, the whole of her large fortune, with the exception of an insignificant annuity secured to her own use, passes, without any act of mine, into other hands. That is the actual state of the case, sir—ha!”

“As you may suppose, Admiral,” replied Ferdinand, “Miss Fleetlands’ fortune is not my object. Let it pass, sir. I would rather that it did.”

“Humph!” broke in the Admiral, upon whom this last piece of information appeared to produce a most exasperating effect. “You are very generous, sir, of what, I may remind you, is not, and can never be yours to give away. With a little more knowledge of the world, sir, you would have been aware that upon my ward’s marriage, whenever that event may take place, it will be my duty as her guardian to see, and in fact the Court of Chancery will insist, that her property is settled upon herself in the customary manner. And when you speak of Miss Fleetlands’ fortune not being your object, and of allowing it, as you say, to pass; the observation may be a romantic one, and made in good faith into the bargain,—but it necessarily

leads to questions which we should scarcely discuss in good temper."

"I am quite at a loss to understand your meaning, Admiral."

"My meaning, sir, is this!" retorted the other, almost fiercely. "You are heir, as all the world knows, to a viscount's coronet. Probably to an immense estate. As to the latter point, I know nothing whatever. My Lord St. Margarets' lands may be entailed, or they may not; and he may live thirty years yet, and I hope he will. Sir, I have not the honour to enjoy your father's friendship, and circumstances have occurred—circumstances to which I need not advert at present—which seem to have placed a bar between us. And now, sir, do you come from Lord St. Margarets, without one word of courtesy from him, haughtily to ask for my ward, and fling her money to the winds

like dirt? Or do you come, sir, simply upon your own account, unprepared to inform me whether Miss Fleetlands would be received at Saintswood at all?—as ignorant as I am myself of the aspect in which your father would regard such an alliance upon your part, and of the prospects which you would be able to offer her, could everything be arranged as you wish? You propose, as I understand, to throw her fortune overboard. And you expect me to fold my arms and allow this to be done, without the slightest opportunity of judging as to whether or no you are in a position to replace that which in the whim of the moment you boast of being ready to scatter. Sir, could you marry her to-morrow, regardless of my consent, you might certainly show that money was not at present your object—not however by sacrificing anything to which you have or can ever have lawful claim, but by virtually

sweeping away from Miss Fleetlands every sixpence of her private and independent patrimony. That would be liberal indeed ! Sir, if I have rendered myself thus far intelligible I will merely add, that had the negotiation which I understand you to propose, been fairly and formally opened in the first instance, my only answer could have been, that, for these three years to come, it would be inconsistent with my duty as guardian, for me to allow it to be entertained at all. Under present circumstances, I must distinctly, upon my ward's account and my own, finally decline the honour which you propose to do her."

"In that case, I need trespass no further upon your time," remarked Captain Hunsdon, gravely, as he rose to take leave..

"After what I have felt it my duty to say, sir," rejoined the Admiral, "you will not think it strange, if, for obvious reasons,

I request your word that all intercourse whatever between yourself and Miss Fleetlands will be at once and henceforward totally discontinued."

"If you are serious in requesting that at your instance I should pledge myself to any particular course of conduct with respect to any person alive, you must be aware that there is only one answer," returned the young officer, buttoning his cloak. "We had better part without further words."

"Not quite so, sir; not quite so!" interposed the Admiral. "It is my duty, sir, to protect my ward against, I will not say solicitation, but against anything which could only tend to unsettle and disturb her mind, and place her in a false and most improper position. Sir, unless you tender me the pledge which I require, before we part this night, Miss Fleetlands does not quit

these grounds again, so long as you remain in the county. Make it necessary, sir, and she does not pass yonder hall-door. One step more, and her room becomes her prison! The power is in my hands; and it is you, sir, and not me, that she will have to thank, should it at once be put in exercise."

Ferdinand's face grew suddenly quite pale. His eyes looked as if a light were slowly passing behind them, and his lips assumed a slight yet peculiar curve. Perhaps it was after some such look that in a desperate hour, not many months before, he had 'called upon' his men!

"Admiral Mortlake," he said, "I know what is due to a man in his own house. I am sorry that you did not take my advice just now. You should have permitted our conversation to close as it stood. Allow me to pass you. It is time."

And the Admiral was alone.

CHAPTER IX.

I AM going to take the liberty of hazarding a guess as to the true explanation of Admiral Mortlake's conduct in the interview which I have just described.

For many years previously, his views with regard to Helen, seem to have been little better than selfish and mercenary. He was receiving a considerable sum annually upon her account; and between the natural desire to retain so easy a source of income, and the dread of being dragged into Chancery upon the score of past receipts, he had

come to regard her marriage as a day of evil, to be postponed as long as possible, and awaited at last as one of the inevitable misfortunes of life. Still, since it was morally certain that Helen would marry somebody, one might have supposed that he would not only have seen in the heir of the St. Margarets, a husband who would do credit to his choice and care, but rejoiced in the absolute certainty that the whole question of arrears, if such really existed, would be settled at once :—dismissed in fact as an idle topic.

And so it might have been, but for the affront which he conceived that Lord St. Margarets had put upon him, in the matter of that wretched bargain and sale. That he could not forgive. And that, coupled with what he was pleased to stigmatize as stolen interviews, and love on the sly, roused up in

him the dogged spirit of resistance, until, dismissing all prudential considerations, he made up his mind to fight, and allowed temper to clear the deck.

Whether or not, had Ferdinand only inherited a portion of his father's diplomatic wisdom, and condescended to coax and be cunning, instead of marching out like a man who had been defrauded and did well to be angry, is not now a very important question. It is even possible that you may think that the Admiral had some show of reason in his view of the case. At all events he thought he had ; for, next morning, he sent for his lawyer.

Mr. Clover, attorney at law, the leading practitioner in that direction at St. Mark's-on-the-Sea, was a little, sturdy, middle-aged man, whose maxim was, '*bonne guerre—bon paix* !' In other words he always liked

to see his clients fight first, and shake hands afterwards. By this means, a great deal of unworthy haggling was avoided; and the parties, instead of hating each other, as people always do, who imagine that they have been overreached in a compromise, retired with feelings of mutual respect. And, lastly, Mr. Clover's reward was written upon blue-ruled foolscap, tied up with green ferret; instead of being limited to the territorial recompense ultimately in store for the peace-makers.

You would never have supposed from his conversation, however, that Mr. Clover was the man to draw you into a needless quarrel. Quite the reverse. He was so particularly dry and guarded in the matter of giving advice, and discountenanced so gravely all that seemed to savour of precipitation, and took such a responsible amount of snuff, that

your only doubt was, whether he would ever get the coach started at all—never, whether he would rattle the ribbons, flick the leaders, and upset the whole concern into the ditch.

“We must not be too precipitate, Admiral, indeed we must not,” he remarked, after half an hour’s conference. “An application to the Court in a matter of this description is not to be lightly risked, nor, generally speaking, without some more distinctly overt act upon the part of the individual sought to be affected. Still, sir,”—he proceeded, after an infamously large pinch—“still, sir; whilst we must by all means avoid precipitation, we must not, on the other hand, lay ourselves open to the charge of negligence. Our course, should we feel it right to adopt an active one, is plain. It is to restrain Captain Hunsdon from all intercourse,

whether written or verbal, with your ward. In these cases the affidavit is half the battle. The affidavit is everything. And it seems to me that we are in a position to swear as good an affidavit as ever was put upon the file. Miss Fleetlands under age by these three years—her property diverted upon marriage without consent—clandestine interviews—suitor barely one-and-twenty—no proposal for settlements upon the part of his father, who to best of deponent's knowledge, information, and belief, is either unaware of or opposed to the conduct of the respondent—unsuitable match altogether. Hang it, Admiral, what could one want more? I'm afraid we must go on."

"Go on, then," growled the Admiral. "Sir, you precisely expressed the reasons upon which I desire to put an end to this absurd and most objectionable flirtation.

Am I to understand that you see your way to doing so at once and effectually?"

"Certainly, Admiral. God bless me, yes! I shall write up by to-night's post to have affidavit settled by counsel, and sent down at once to be sworn."

"And then, sir—ha?"

"Then, sir, we obtain an *ex parte* injunction, as a matter of course, and serve the captain forthwith. And, after that, sir, he'd better mind his moves. You see there's the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Queen's prison, and commitment during pleasure, all upon the cards if he doesn't. Famous!" concluded Mr. Clover, smacking his lips and tapping his box, like a man who has just produced a very particular bottle, and is confident as to flavour.

"Good!" snorted the client. "Hope they'll clap him in irons, with a sentry over him!" And so the conversation ended.

Without the slightest ill-feeling in the world towards Ferdinand, for whom indeed he really felt a sincere respect, the opportunity of inflicting a marked and mortal snub upon his haughty neighbour at Saintswood, was temptation too strong for the Admiral. Such a chance might not occur again in a lifetime, and he determined to make the most of it. That it might be unwise to invite the direct attention of the Court of Chancery to his conduct in the guardianship, was a reflection which of course had not escaped him. But it also occurred to his mind that a bold stroke might, after all, be the safest in the end. It would at least have the effect of scaring inferior intruders out of the field. And since, unless, contrary to all probability, Lord St. Margarets should take up the affair in earnest upon his son's behalf, which he could scarcely

do without absolutely tendering him as Helen's suitor, the game was in his own hands.

There are two mistakes so universally committed by people, upon falling in love for the first time, that they seem rather part of the diagnosis of the complaint than mere instances of casual weakness upon the part of individuals.

In the first place, they never see any difficulties at starting: none at least which, in their early ardour, appear of more account than the hurdles in a steeple-chase. Without these, there would be no sport—no excitement—no triumph in ultimate success. In the second place, directly a difficulty is really reached, it presents itself as a hurdle ten feet high, with a ditchful of spikes and pitchforks on either side. And unlucky Strephon at once discovers that nobody, since

love was invented, ever ran his head against such a barbarous and insurmountable chevaux de frise ; and would like to make the world ring with lamentations, and complaints of a measure of ill-luck, heaped as measure never was heaped before.

Perhaps to say the truth, Ferdinand's first hurdle was rather a stiff one, and might well have cost him a little uneasiness.

It was with infinite difficulty that he managed, as in duty bound, to carry on his duties as host, and give no outward token of the volcano that was burning within. It was too frightful, so he felt at least, not only to have awakened in Helen's young mind expectations which, to use the Admiral's own words, seemed likely to end in disappointment and useless pain, but to have actually roused feelings in the heart of that old curmudgeon which would assuredly be

vented upon herself. And that coward threat —“make it necessary, sir, and her room becomes her prison!” rang and reverberated in his ears with such intolerable and insulting violence, that he thought of the Chamber of Horrors in Baker Street, and felt his pulse.

from Lausand
 The worst of it was, that there was no human being to whom he could apply for sympathy, advice, or assistance. He had spoken manfully to his father when he first found himself touched, and had no reason to repent of having done so: but to go to him again would be simply idle. A few empty expressions of profound condolence—a mist of insincere hopes that something might yet supervene, and a sprinkling of polite regrets that his Lordship's own relations with the Admiral were such as necessarily to preclude his own personal interference—even if such interference could, by any possibility, have

been of use—were, he knew, all that he had to expect.

He did not know, and we will not tell him, that his profound papa, not altogether confident as to the success of his previous diplomacy, had already taken the most effective steps towards having him forthwith recalled to his regiment; and had written letter after letter to know if there was not some non-combatant capacity in which his lately-wounded son could be immediately required to serve. Neither was he aware, which we will also consider confidential, that Lord St. Margarets had carefully arranged that his bailiff should pick a little perverse quarrel with the Admiral's people upon some trumpery question of trespass over adjoining lands, and thereby incensed that irascible old gentleman against the whole house of Hunsdon to a degree which threat-

ened apoplexy. . . So smooth, silent, and unsuspected is the under-current of affairs when guided by the discretion of ex-ambassadors.

There was Mr. Salterton certainly—his own former tutor—to whom he had already appealed in a difficulty, but to whom, whether wisely or not, he felt it in that conjuncture impossible to resort. The Rector, as we know, was associated with the Admiral in the trusteeship created by Colonel Fleetlands' will. Still, he was not Helen's guardian ; and Ferdinand felt a natural delicacy in, as it were, inviting him to intermeddle. Besides, his interference could work no possible good, and nothing but additional humiliation could spring from it. So the young soldier found himself alone, with no other counsellor than his own resolute heart. Then was the time to think. Then was the

time to decide ; without one gainsaying word ! Swift was the thought—stern the resolution. The council-chamber was closed : the doors locked ; and the word passed for war !

His first impulse, and one upon which he immediately acted, was to write to Helen herself. I shall resist the temptation to give the letter verbatim, because love effusions, however worthy of the occasion, appear generally, either insipid or ridiculous to outsiders who read in cold blood. But I will take upon myself to say that it was a brave, manly letter, which told his own feelings in as few words as could be expected, and challenged her own in terms equally plain. He mentioned, as he was bound to mention, something of what had passed between her guardian and himself, carefully avoiding whatever might, even in the slightest de-

gree, have conveyed an impression of petulance or ill-will. And then, if she felt towards him at all as he to her, he begged one single interview; and as it was his place to make things as easy as possible, and to name a rendezvous, he inquired if there was any time, either by day or night, at which he might hope to find her, even for a few moments, in the little summer-house where their eyes had first met. If she ever found an opportunity or answering, and would only name an hour, he would be there.

This letter he entrusted to his own groom, Ailsa, a smart, intelligent ex-sergeant of dragoons, who had a wonderful way with people, male or female, and always succeeded in his errands. Tell him what was to be done, and he did it, without even asking a question, which was marvellous.

“Ailsa, my lad, this note is for Miss

Fleetlands, at Riverwood — prisoner with enemy. Do you understand?"

"I will see to it, Captain," replied Ailsa pleasantly, touching, as he spoke, the peak of a supposed cap.

And when Ailsa said that he would 'see to a thing,' that thing was as good as done. Nobody knew exactly how he managed his missions—least of all, people whom he absorbed into unsuspecting complicity. Why, indeed, should we know, or want to know? When your doctor sets you upon two legs again, after a week on your back, you don't ask him why he wrote the prescriptions which did the business, in cuneiform symbols and Gower Street Latin, instead of Queen's English. Bull's-eyes are the real thing in life, and the world in general has nothing to do but to look to the score. Helen's letter was in safe hands, and reached her own before dinner time.

To picture the delighted surprise with which it was received, would probably be impossible in print. Who has not dreamt some splendid dream, and woke up with a sigh, that the glimpse of happiness, just seen and lost, belonged to another world—a living, vivid realm into which, in this mysterious helpless way, we are sometimes permitted to peep—a world from which, alas, we can bring nothing back to this. But, O, to be told, on waking, just as we had dismissed the magic story as a baseless fancy of the night—a vision to be rubbed away from morning eyes—“It is all true! Dreamer, you have not dreamt in vain! Wake up; for it is real! Wake up; amid the lights and the music and the love of fairy land!” Why, then, we might probably scratch our eyes to some purpose, and feel very much like Miss Helen.

Ferdinand's note was not an easy one to answer ; nor was the swift and delightful emotion which it produced, altogether favourable to business.

I hope you will not at once set Helen down as a young lady of ill-regulated mind, if I confess that the idea of a clandestine interview was eagerly welcomed, as something particularly delightful. Such meetings formed an essential item in every romance which she had ever read ; indeed, without some such adventure, the story of her own life would be as tame as a tract. Besides, Ferdinand's letter had revived old feelings in her mind. Not, indeed, in their girlish bitterness ; but not the less dangerous for all that. It was quite clear that her guardian was playing some deep game, of which she was herself the subject ; and that her future was, in some mysterious manner,

concealed in mist and labyrinth, which was obviously unfair. Ferdinand, she found, had actually asked for her, and had been sternly repulsed, with orders to think of her no more—to address her again at his peril. How was this? Why was she dangerous? What had she done to be thus treated? Upon this footing, she might next hear that Captain Andrew had made a similar application, and be called in to kiss him. This would never do. Sooner or later, she would learn her own position, and there could be no chance like the present.

It was Monday. On Thursday, she knew that her guardian was to attend a meeting at St. Mark's, which would occupy him the entire afternoon. Mrs. Mortlake, after four o'clock, always locked herself up in her own room with a tea-pot, and devoted the time, till dinner, to literary composition. Tracts,

as you are aware, were her strength, or weakness, in that department; and they were regularly read to Helen upon completion, much upon the same principle as that which made Molière recite comic scenes to his housekeeper. Not, of course, to see whether the young lady would laugh, but to try whether she could be induced to look edified, and ask intelligent questions. Perhaps this was one of the reasons which made Helen resolve that her own career should be very different—not, indeed, from those of ‘Abraham Brown, mariner,’ or the ‘Blasphemous Boy of Brighton,’ who was scarified by forked lightning on the spot, which were altogether out of her line—but from the deadly dull experience of the staid and sententious damsels who prosed for her benefit.

So she settled that half-past four o’clock

on Thursday, would be a nice time to name ; and after spoiling several sheets of note paper in trying to frame a reply which should be exactly what it ought to be, gave up the attempt, for the moment, in despair. Miss Smugg would have rattled off an answer in no time. But, then, Serena's notions of maidenly reserve were gleaned from the frank pages of Paul de Kock.

So she locked the new treasure up in her desk, reflecting that there would be plenty of time to write, especially since there was no chance of her being able to post her letter until the following afternoon.

That desk had been a present of the Admiral's, when she first returned from school. It was a beautiful gilt steel-bound affair, with a real Brahma lock ; and Helen had been quite touched by the kindness of an act which possessed her of so charming a

depository for all her little valuables. She did not know—and how should she have suspected—what I blush to write. That desk came home from the maker's with two keys, only one of which found its way into Helen's hand. Mrs. Mortlake took charge of the other.

By what conceivable self-imposture the donor palliated, or supposed that he could palliate, such infamous treachery, I do not care to inquire. I am not, thank goodness, holding a brief for such a rogue, and leave him undefended to his own conscience, and any amount of infamy you may choose to smother him under.

Of course, Admiral Mortlake's long experience of mankind was sufficient to assure him that Ferdinand, after his late rebuff, would lose no time in writing to Helen. Unfortunately, he had better evidence still to work upon.

The dashing ex-sergeant of dragoons had done his part so well, that no human being in the house, except Helen, knew how or when the letter had been delivered. But Crimp was on the Admiral's side, and received secret service pay. Crimp was Mrs. Mortlake's maid, and acted in the same capacity for Helen. Every woman knows when another has received a love-letter. That is a fact; argue over it as long as you like. So Crimp knew, and told the Admiral.

You now know as much as I; and can understand how it came to pass, that even before poor Helen's manuscript was fairly transcribed and posted, Mr. Clover was again in requisition.

The interview was business-like and brief. Admiral Mortlake was in a position to inform his legal adviser, without confessing to the subsidiary and shameful source of

information, which, however, he had freely used, that he had been informed, and had the best reason to believe that Captain Hunsdon's attentions had reached the stage of written correspondence. That was an important count in the indictment.

"Capital!" replied Mr. Clover, tapping his snuff-box. "Clearly we must proceed at once. I'll write by to-night's post to my London agents, Talbot and Castle, and beg them not to lose an hour. You shall hear from me directly we serve the injunction; and then it's for you, you know, to keep a bright look out."

The eventful Thursday arrived at last. Lord St. Margarets had been obliged, unexpectedly, to return to town, and the party at Saintswood had broken up. It was a relief to Ferdinand to find himself comparatively alone. Distraction is sometimes a

safe and soothing medicine to the self-devouring mind, but like other empiric remedies, if it doesn't happen to hit the particular case, it only aggravates what it was intended to allay.

"Get along with you into society, and forget your troubles in merry-making and parlour dancing, right and left," is a favourite nostrum with old women. It may succeed now and then, with those who are lucky enough to know where to go for the remedy, and young enough to dance back again. But in serious cases, the theory is that of the lunatic, who got into the casualty-ward at Guy's Hospital, and tickled the patients all round.

Ferdinand sat at breakfast alone in the coffee-room, in that delicious state of mental exaltation which is just consistent with practical sanity.

"A young man from London, sir, would be glad of a few minutes conversation, on particular business," said a servant, presenting a card, with this inscription, the address being added in pencil:

MR. JACOBS.

From Talbot and Castle, Lincoln's Inn.

"What does he want? I don't know the fellow. Never heard of such a name. Let him mention his business, if he has any."

This was just what the young man from London had overwhelmingly declined to do. It was with Captain Hunsdon alone, and couldn't possibly be mentioned in the hall.

"Send him in," at last, said Ferdinand.

In came the young man from London,

with brisk step, free and easy wave of his hat, and the general air of a man accustomed to castles.

"Got a nice place of it, indeed, Captain," he began, running his fingers through shocks of well-buttered black hair, and throwing open his overcoat to display the thunder-and-lightning scarf, brimstone buttons, and general dandy-flash make up of a Chancery Lane swell. "Nice place, indeed! You are Captain Hunsdon, I presume?"

"We will not ask questions. Be so good as to mention your business."

"Ah, business, of course! Well, just this," replied the visitor, rummaging in his pockets. "Got my name, you know? Talbot and Castle, Lincoln's Inn, are my governors. And this is a paper, Captain, which you'll have the goodness to look at, perhaps? This one; thank ye. Now, Cap-

tain Hunsdon, you'll take notice that you're served with the injunction of the Court of Chancery against holding any further intercourse whatsoever, whether written, verbal, or oral (if that's anything else), with Miss Helen Fleetlands of Riverwood Lawn, upon pain of commitment—and so forth ; and 'pon my word, do you know, Captain, if you'll allow me, being here, to offer advice as a friend, I should say that, as things go, the sooner you're off with that little party the better. My governors won't stand any nonsense, you may take your oath of that. So if you was just to drop her a line, as much as to say she'd better look out for some other gent in the way of company, you understand, and not get you quodded for nothing ; why," concluded Mr. Jacobs, with a cool wink, " that would be about the c'rect move, in the eye of the law. Nice

place you've got here. Very nice place indeed, captain."

"*What* do you call this?" demanded Ferdinand, holding up, as if by the nape, the document which had just been placed in his hands.

It was a closely written sheet of foolscap paper, bearing a peculiar purple adhesive stamp. I have a copy before me at this moment, but to transcribe it verbatim, would be useless trouble, and savour too much of the shop.

"Office copy of order on motion for injunction, Captain,—that's what it is. Like me to go through it with you? Come along!" exclaimed Mr. Jacobs, preparing to draw a chair to the table, with a wistful glance at the fish and coffee, for he had travelled all the way from London upon a very early breakfast.

"Go through it, indeed!" returned Ferdinand, contemptuously crumpling as he spoke, the piece of paper which had just come a hundred miles for his benefit, and tossing it into the fire. "Now, Mr. Jacobs, you may have simply done your duty, for all I know to the contrary, and if so, you had better begone at once; but if you venture to offer me another syllable of advice—as you are pleased to call it,—or take that young lady's name into your mouth again in my presence, by George, sir, I will have you tumbled into a large pond by gamekeepers, before you are ten minutes older. There! I have rung for them. Don't wait, if you care about going home dry."

"O, I say though!" exclaimed Mr. Jacobs, combing his hair rapidly with his fingers, as he edged away in the direction of the door, "this won't do, you know,

Captain, at any price! This is contempt, you know—gross contempt. You'll find you've put your foot in it, Captain, as sure as you stand there!"

"Send a couple of under-keepers here, directly," said Ferdinand to the servant who answered the bell. "Contempt, indeed!" taking the words in their social, rather than professional meaning.

"No, don't!" cried the young man from London. "Hi! show us out, somebody! Which is the way through these horrid long halls? I say, who let me in? Don't send the couple, footman! I'm going, Captain—I'm going—gone ever so long ago!" And Mr. Jacobs was forthwith seen diving down the approach, with his heels clicking his shoulder-blades, at a pace which would be very insufficiently described as a 'double.'

The being tumbled in a horse-pond upon

an empty stomach, is a process which, without being over-particular, most of us would wish to evade, even if certain that the aggressor would be never so quickly visited and chastised. This was just Mr. Jacobs's reflection. He had done his work, and even gone out of his way in supplementing it with gratuitous advice. But some people never know how to be grateful. Supposing that he had stood upon his rights, and defied Ferdinand to touch him at his peril; not all the men of Saintswood could have saved their young master from prison before the week was out, had he ruffled so much as one anointed hair of the Chancery protected puppy.

However, as I said before, he had done his work. That foul scrap of foolscap placed in Ferdinand's hand, had laid a bar between himself and Helen. They were fellow-

creatures still, if that was any comfort. But their lots had been shorn asunder by an edict. They were never to meet again without permission, on pain of imprisonment—upon his part, at least. By neither word or sign, look or line, must any communication take place. The Court of Chancery, which can marry nobody, had unmarried them by anticipation, and warned them thenceforth, to walk apart, and with averted eyes.

Of course the apparition of this Lincoln's Inn gorilla had no influence whatever upon Captain Hunsdon's conduct. Helen and he met in the summer-house at the appointed hour, and had it all their own way. I am neither going to peep nor listen upon such an occasion. Earnestly, happily, daringly they talked, and laughed—I have no doubt—merrily over the episode of the young

man from London, and at the ridiculous imbecility of guardians, Lord High Chancellors, and other meddlesome people in general. Nothing could be definitively settled just then, except that they must meet again, and that very often. And they parted at last, and how Helen got back to her room, she never knew, but there seemed a rich and radiant mist around her pathway, and a band played a march in the air, or somewhere among the glooming yews; and the statues, as she hurried by, were all alive and excited; and she reached her own room at last, unobserved, and flung herself upon the bed in an ecstasy of joyous tears.

And how came it to pass that the Admiral, knowing all he did, did not take, as it was his duty to take, due steps to render impossible this most undesirable meeting? The truth is, that Ferdinand's letter, which had

been perused by his wife, in Helen's desk, had misled him altogether. It had never entered his mind that 'the summer house where their eyes first had met,' referred to the little pavilion in his own grounds. Not having the slightest idea that his ward and Captain Hunsdon had ever met there, he naturally enough concluded that the words had reference to some spot at which, upon riding occasions, they might have indulged in an impromptu *tête-à-tête*. Thus it was that all his precautions turned out quite inadequate to prevent the interview; although he was not so ill served as to remain unaware of its accomplishment. In short, Captain Hunsdon was observed leaving the grounds, and thenceforth his doom was sealed.

An attachment was issued, at the instance of the industrious Mr. Clover, and executed

a few days later, when, as it happened, Ferdinand was wandering in the neighbourhood of the bower, like a gentleman Peri who had lost his latch key.

In case you should like to peruse a true copy of this ugly but influential document, here it is. Travellers, as we all know, when pursued by bears, are ready to fling overboard, for the examination of these animals, anything which seems likely to attract their attention, and divert it, however transiently, from themselves. You must not be offended at the allusion. I am upon an unpleasant topic, and wish to close the present chapter as speedily as may be. Therefore, if you will good-naturedly snuff at the Writ, instead of pursuing me with a demand for minute particulars of an arrest which ought never to have become possible, I shall consider it a particular favour.

ATTACHMENT—(Chancery.)

VICTORIA, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith, to the Sheriff of Southern-shire, GREETING. We command you to attach CAPTAIN FERDINAND HUNSDON of Saintswood in your county aforesaid, so as to have him before us in our Court of Chancery on the first day of March next, wheresoever the said Court shall then be, there to answer to us as well touching a Contempt which he, as it is alleged, hath committed against us, and also such other matters as shall be then and there laid to his Charge, and further to perform and abide such Order as our said Court shall make in this behalf. And hereof fail not, and Bring this Writ with you. Witness Ourselves at Westminster, &c. &c.

Such was the writ. The housemaid's story, already reported, was necessarily rubbish; but nevertheless Captain Hunsdon was in fact not only caught, but carried off to London; and conveyed in a cab to the Queen's Prison without superfluous ceremony, and with a certain business-like promptitude in the highest degree exasperating.

He was however neither lowered into a dungeon nor loaded with chains, nor even left all night with a lamp out of reach, a

pitcher of water, and a crusty loaf, like the bad young man in the wood-cut. He was only marshalled into a tight little room, asked what he would like for dinner, and advised to send for his solicitor.

It was rather a scrape certainly; and might have been an ugly one for you or me. But, bah! The Chancery Lion must blink now and then—if only to keep himself wide awake for chance comers. And what came of it all you shall learn in due time.

A furious explosion followed, between Helen and the Admiral. How it began is not so certain; but she reproached him with treachery, cowardice, and cruelty. And he, not being quick at repartee, and stung by unpalatable truisms, replied in terms of clumsy banter, and told her, with prolonged guffaws over his own delicate humour, that the Captain had been arrested for poaching. That was all!

CHAPTER X.

A GREAT many years ago—more indeed than I find any satisfaction in reckoning—I used to sleep in a little white bed, in a well-filled nursery, at the top of a tall house in Wimpole Street.

Well, once it so happened that long after we children were asleep, and the place quiet for the night, the nurse and the nursery-maid took advantage of the mysterious stillness of the hour to set about the concoction of some elaborate cosmetic wherewith to sleek their soft ambrosial locks in the morning. I do not know the exact recipe which

they had been fortunate enough to secure ; and am almost reluctant to name the only two ingredients as to which I am morally certain. Gin and pig-suet are homely items, but great is the power of alchemy, and wonderful results are sometimes achieved out of very unpromising materials.

In this instance the process went on with unusual rapidity, for the gallipot boiled over. There was a fizz and a gush of solid flame which licked the ceiling. There were shrill screams from the fair Rosecrucians, who expected nothing less than to go down alive and blazing into the cellarage.

The whole household was instantly in commotion. Everybody came jumping upstairs, like moths to a candle ; and the alarm was upon the point of being given up and down the street. Luckily there stood a large tub in the corner, wherein I was regu-

larly soused at break of day ; and it occurred to somebody, whose presence of mind must have been remarkable, to send the contents bodily into the immediate centre of danger. Under this hydropathic treatment the conflagration was soon subdued ; and, barring a suffocating atmosphere of steam and hot rags, a few odd sparks wandering like flies, and a din which might have come from the Tower of Babel on fire, all immediate reason for disquietude was at an end.

“ Jane—Jane ! what’s the matter ? ” exclaimed I, sitting up like a little white scarecrow in bed. “ What makes the room full of smoke, and why are they throwing all the slops up the chimney, and what’s everybody upstairs for ? ”

“ You lie down and go to sleep again, this very minute,” replied the nursery-maid. “ There isn’t nothing at all the

matter, It was the leg of our table came off. That's all."

I have always considered this as about the finest instance of a ready fib within the limit of my own personal experience. And I never hear an absurdly and palpably untrue reason given for any phenomenon without thinking of the leg of our nursery table.

Of course the explanation with which the Admiral had pretended to account for Ferdinand's abrupt disappearance, did not for one moment impose upon Helen. Indeed, it was never intended to do so. It was simply an intimation that if she chose to cry for her lover she would be treated like a baby, and must be content with a child's answer.

As you may suppose, she was desperately angry. She lost no time in hurrying to Mr. Salterton for sympathy and advice; and with eager lips and lighted eyes poured her

whole peck of troubles into his indulgent ear. She went to him as a child to a parent, and told him all that had happened. No one knows what the confession cost her, but she wanted absolution for the past, and counsel for the future, and wisely began by making a clean breast.

I think that we are very often unfair towards people whom we consult in our difficulties. You, for instance, have been illused, suppose, by A, and have resented it more or less becomingly. You bring me your version of the story, and expect my friendly sympathy, my entire acquiescence in your own conduct, and unqualified condemnation of A. And you are disappointed, because I give an opinion with some reserve, and don't express myself with indignant enthusiasm in your favour.

But remember: in the first place I may

have my doubts about the merits of the case ; and yet, without insincerity, decline informing you of my suspicions. If I think you unreasonably angry with A, I reflect, with some justice, that you may probably be still more so with me, should I take his part. Again, I have no personal quarrel myself with your antagonist ; and though I may think that he has not behaved to you quite as well as he might, I don't intend to give you the opportunity of telling him so from me. Moreover, it may so happen that should I confess how exceedingly ill I think you have been used, I should stand pledged, in your opinion at least, to some active course of conduct, of which I cannot expect you to perceive the disadvantage. Possibly too, in blaming A, I might be indirectly blaming myself. So that, if you choose to force your confidence upon me, you should

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recollect that there may be excellent reasons which prevent me, in spite of our friendship, from mixing myself up, with too much alacrity, in the quarrel, and perhaps turning your little duel with A into a triangular battle.

Could Helen only have known what was passing in the Rector's mind, she would have had no cause to be dissatisfied. Rumour, of course, had been busy with the gross and extraordinary affront which had been put upon a person in Captain Hunsdon's position ; and the most exciting accounts of the whole transaction were in free circulation. All this had caused him the deepest uneasiness, and Helen's unreserved confidence was received with a feeling of thankfulness and relief. He was aware of the feud which existed between the Admiral and Lord St. Margarets, and rightly guessed the

leading motive which had induced the former to act as he had done. He considered the Admiral's conduct base, ungenerous, and unkind ; and his indignation—for he could be famously indignant when he saw reason—blazed hot and high upon Helen's behalf.

Yet, what was he to say to her ? To speak his own thoughts—to set ward against guardian—would be simply breach of duty, both as a clergyman and a gentleman. He could only, in the kindest and most considerate manner, set before her the leading points of her position. During the next three years, at all events, the Admiral had an unqualified right to her obedience. He stood in her father's place ; and her father's will was explicit upon one subject at least—that of discouraging an early marriage. She and Ferdinand wouldn't be the battered

old couple they might possibly imagine, even were her bridal morning postponed till twenty-one. Even an additional two years would be nothing very serious. In the mean time she must wait and be patient.

“I know all that, Mr. Salterton,” interrupted Helen. “I could be as patient, I suppose, as most people, if there were nothing but misfortune the matter; but you must see that, in a thousand ways, I have been cruelly ill-used. One word would have been enough at the beginning—but to leave things to go on by themselves, and to keep spies peeping without warning, and then to do this at last, is enough to break one’s heart. I only know that he has forfeited all my respect; whilst, as to any sort of confidence in his honour, that’s gone and done for, long ago!”

“I see,” observed the Rector. “And if

he should, by any possibility, wish to be heard upon his own account, you would rather that he held his tongue?"

"Certainly. I should wish to have nothing more to say to him. I wouldn't sleep another night in his house, if I could help it."

"And you would punish him, I suppose, if you had the power?"

"I should send him to jail directly," replied Helen; apparently surprised at the question.

"And show him neither justice nor mercy?"

"Lots of justice, and very little mercy," returned the young lady. "I see what you mean, Mr. Salterton. You want to show me what might be said upon his account. No use at all! When a person does me a plain downright wrong, and says, 'beg par-

don,' I'll shake hands and forgive him, any day. When he's been mean and malicious I'll forgive him, without shaking hands. But when he's been both mean and malicious, and wants to palaver afterwards, and talk about good intentions and all that sort of thing, why that party goes to jail, quick, when I'm Queen, and doesn't come out till long after he's shockingly sorry. Do you think me very wicked?"

"Not in the least, my dear. I don't doubt but that you have cause to be angry. Turn the matter over coolly, and we'll talk again. Perhaps I am rather too much of your mood to be an useful guide at present. Only let us recollect two things—first, that to condemn a person unheard, even if we could march him to the treadmill at once, is an incomplete and savage sort of satisfaction; secondly, that to give ourselves the

trouble of enquiring whether his conduct, looking at it in all possible lights, may not admit of some sort of excuse, is to assume a much worthier position than to sit scolding from below, like somebody who has been stepped upon. Isn't it so, Helen?"

"Perhaps. I dare say you are right. Only, you see, Mr. Salterton, I do so wish that all this trouble had happened to somebody else!"

"So do I, with all my heart! What business have you with any trouble at all? Only, since things are so ordered, you will have to show how somebody else ought to behave. Let us talk of this again another day."

I have preserved the above scraps of conversation entire, partly, perhaps, as being in some degree characteristic of the parties—partly, because, to a certain extent, it may

have done good in its way. People of Helen's temperament are much more easily guided than driven, and it might not have been wise to challenge her to argue the matter fairly out. A quiet course of sympathy, without prejudice, as lawyers say, to what might possibly be advanced on the other side, was best calculated to calm her mind, and allow it to work for good. Any appeal to higher motives might probably, at the moment, have been unsuccessful and mischievous. Unless religion be the ruling and habitual guide of life—and alas! how few among us dare suppose that it is so in their own case?—it is dragged into play at an immense disadvantage when its precepts are suggested as a consolation to the spirit smarting under a direct sense of injury and injustice. Passions must calm, and reason in some degree regain her balance before we

can accept a divine arbitration, and patiently regard the oppressor, safe under its eternal shield.

With Helen, a very long time, I am sorry to say, was occupied in this cooling process. She broke her whip, and vowed that she would never mount Camilla again. All the Admiral's advances were repelled with supreme disdain ; and his wife's daily invitations to tracts and tea disrespectfully declined. She wandered all day about the place in moody despair, wishing almost that she could only see her way out of the dreadful labyrinth of life. That last, one passionate hour with Ferdinand burnt like wild-fire within her brain : but he was gone—she knew not whither : she was controlled—she scarcely knew by what invisible power : her future, her fortune, and her freedom were in the hands of one whom she deliberately re-

garded as a tyrant and a villain. Existence had become insupportable.

This could not last for ever. One morning she surprised the Admiral and his wife, by suddenly assuming much of her old demeanour. She actually volunteered conversation at breakfast, caught perch before luncheon, and quoted one of her own tracts to Mrs. Mortlake, which so delighted that lady, that Helen was in no small danger of figuring, herself, in some future page, as an instance of the efficacy of good advice laid on thick. More than this, she confessed to her instructress that she stood self-convicted of an indolent and selfish life, and would like nothing better than to be put in the way of doing needlework for charitable purposes. This was adding fruit to flower; and, though she was no great hand at thread and thimble, her industry was rewarded with all

praise, and stimulated by unlimited supplies of raw material.

Probably you may have already suspected the secret of this mysterious change in Helen's behaviour. If not, without expressing any opinion whatever as to your perspicacity, I will proceed to inform you. She had resolved to run away.

It was a wild, sudden determination, the result at first of a momentary and wayward impulse ; but the idea throve and strengthened the more it was reflected upon. Her life at Riverwood had become simply intolerable, and the prospect of liberty, excitement and adventure, even to the very limited extent in which a self-emancipated young lady could expect to revel in such forbidden luxuries, had an intoxicating charm for Helen. This, however, was not all. If she could only get clear away for a fortnight or

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three weeks, she knew that the consternation produced by her disappearance would be feebly described by the Admiral's favourite simile of 'The Devil to Pay.' Something was certain to turn up. Very probably, as her limited experience of Chancery procedure suggested, her guardian would find himself in preciously hot water upon her account. Serve him right for not taking better care of her. Nothing would be more likely to set the Court going again than the news that its Ward was upon her travels with nobody's leave—least of all, her appointed Guardian's. Why, it might even end in her being removed from his custody altogether, and handed over to Mr. Salterton, whom Sophy Hunter's old brother had acutely indicated, as the next card in the pack. Perhaps it might result in something better still—who knew? The Court

of Chancery, as she was aware from the newspapers, is perpetually reversing its own decrees. Suppose it did so in the present instance, when the whole story came before it again. Wouldn't Ferdinand be required to marry her at once, or go back to prison? How was that, she wondered, as a dry point of law? At all events, the oppressive mystery by which she felt surrounded would, some how or another, be infallibly cleared up. Questions would be asked and answered; and, come what might, anything was preferable to the hopeless, helpless present.

I don't mean, in my capacity as a Chancery barrister, to commit myself entirely to this view of the case. But the scheme certainly had one or two possible advantages; always provided that it could successfully be carried into effect.

How to get away, in the first place, and how to dispose of herself when this was done, in the second, were the chief points to be settled; and it is only doing Helen justice to say that these problems were deliberately and skilfully worked out.

Merely to escape from the Lawn was an operation which presented no great difficulty. Beyond a prohibition against leaving the grounds unattended, and a pretty strict amount of surveillance undertaken by Miss Crimp, she was at liberty to do much as she pleased; and there were plenty of places where she could slip out upon the high road whenever she thought proper. This, however, although a step certainly, was only a step in the direction of freedom. Her only means of actual escape lay in availing herself of the railway; and this was not quite so easy. There were two stations within reach;

one, as we are already aware, at St. Mark's-on-the-Sea, the other some four miles from the Lawn, at Bunnytall Bottom.

But at both of these stations, she was perfectly well known to the authorities; and she suspected, probably not without reason, that they might have received hints from the Admiral which would lead to highly disagreeable results if she walked in alone for a ticket.

A disguise was the obvious resource, and it was with this end in view that she fell in so amiably with Mrs. Mortlake's schemes, and stitched clothes for poor people like a regular sempstress. In a few weeks she had managed to provide herself, on the sly, with a print-gown, a coloured petticoat, a plain check shawl, and close straw bonnet, partly her own handiwork—partly purloined from the charity-stores of her preceptress, to

which her diligence had obtained for her free admission. All these, together with a covered basket containing sundry little matters, neither necessarily nor unnecessarily to be mentioned, she quietly smuggled away, and hid piecemeal in one of the great cupboards of her house in the garden, of which she carefully kept the key. This was the secret of her whole scheme. When the materials for disguise were complete, nothing could be easier than to stroll out some afternoon—change her clothes in the summer-house, leaving her usual dress snugly locked up, and march off whither she listed. She determined, further, to carry away nothing whatever from her dressing-room which could possibly be missed, so that the real meaning of her absence should remain unsuspected as long as possible; and that, when search came to be made for her, it should be assumed

as certain that she had departed wearing the identical costume in which she had been last seen. This would of course throw everybody upon a wrong scent, and was a conception for which she naturally gave herself credit.

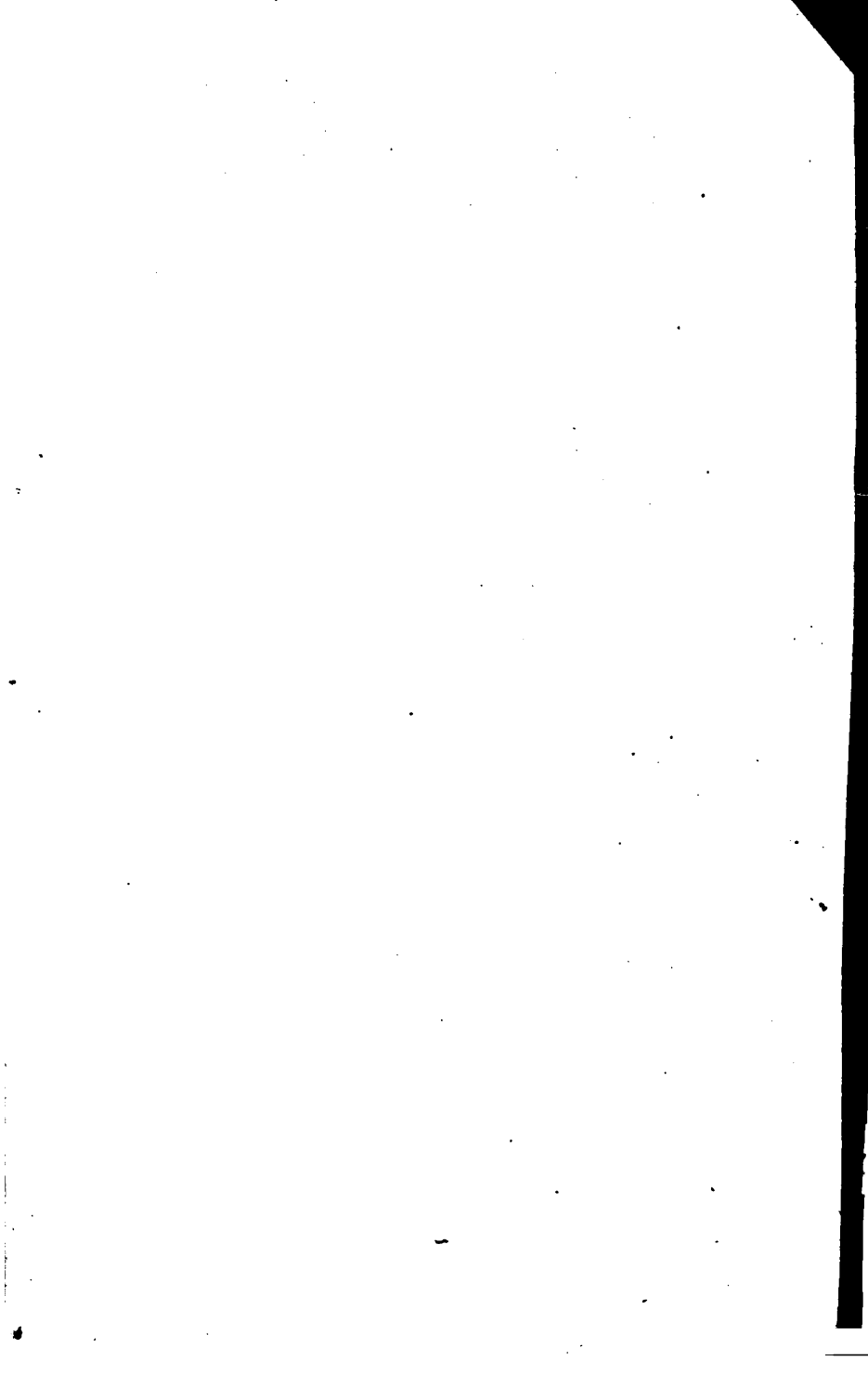
As to how she should dispose of herself when fairly launched upon the world, like a parlour-maid unattached, her projects were perhaps a little in the air. This part of the programme, naturally, did not admit of being arranged quite so artistically as the other. Indeed, if one could map out everything in the shape of adventure before-hand, the 'going in quest' would be clear waste of travelling and time. Nevertheless, Helen had a scheme of her own, to begin with; but, as I suppose you will not close these pages without accompanying her to the end of her rambles, I shall not lose ground at

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present by anticipating what you may, in due time, discover for yourself.

I ought to mention, perhaps, that out of her last instalment of pocket-money, Helen had nearly twenty pounds at her command, which seemed amply sufficient for her purpose. It is true that she owed the greater part of this sum to her milliner and other similar claimants; but they would have to wait for their money. It was an unlucky necessity—part of the fortune of war.

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